

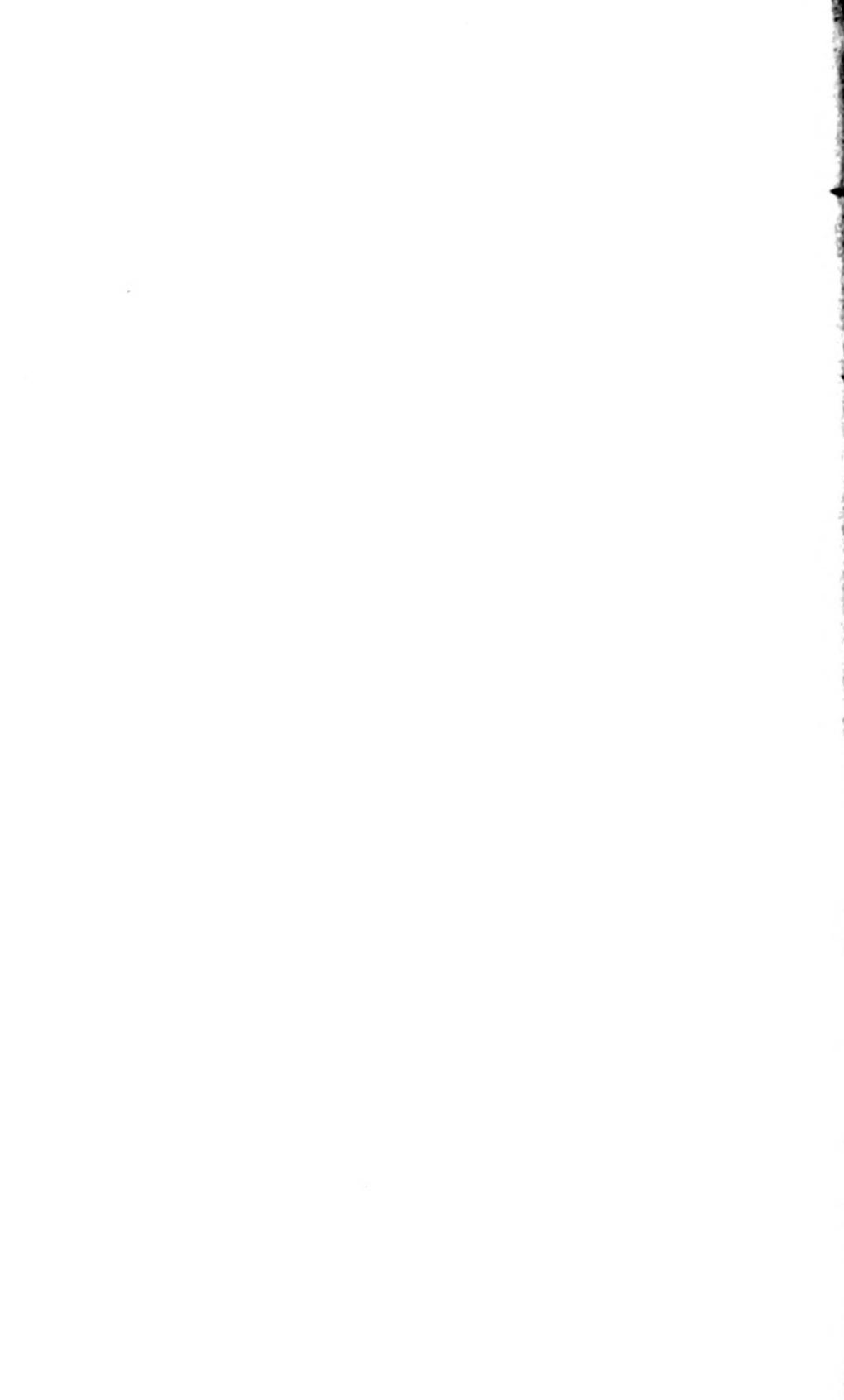
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MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS;

A TALE OF THE YEAR 1830.

What gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
When Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train
Garters, and Stars and Coronets appear,
And in soft sounds "Your Grace" salutes the ear!

RAPE OF THE LOCK.

mrs. Catherine Frances Gore

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

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C. Whiting, Beaufort House, Strand.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

I sometimes almost think that eyes have ears ;
This much is sure—that *out* of earshot, things
Are somehow echoed to the pretty dears,
Of which I can't tell whence their knowledge springs.

Byron.

ABOUT ten days after this afflicting explanation, Mary Willingham chanced to find herself at a party at Lady Dynevour's, interpolated into a group composed of the Miss Lorimers, and two or three “young men about town,” upon whom they were in the habit of bestowing the exuberance of their colloquial

animation, after the fashion conventionally denominated “flirting.” They were two good-humoured, lively girls; but so ill-trained (according to Lady Maria Willingham’s notion of education), as to distinguish very slightly between the “good matches” and the “detrimentals;”—and they were accordingly surrounded, on most occasions, by young ensigns in the Guards, Foreign-office and Treasury honourables, scarcely yet fledged into official importance, and other equally unavailable representatives of the masculine sex;—good at most for a *galopade* or a mazurka—to carry chairs in Kensington Gardens, or escort a fidgety horse through the exciting equestrian mob of the Parks.

“What has become of Frederick?” inquired Sir Comyne Wallace of Gertrude Lorimer. “I have been down to my uncle, in Shropshire, for a week, to see what has been done towards expediting him into an apoplexy; and I have not had a glimpse of Lorimer since my return.”

“Of Frederick?—Have you heard nothing

of his departure?—Why, he has been gone so long, that we have almost forgotten him! By this time poor Fred. is probably wandering on the banks of the Elbe, with a Meerschaum in his mouth, and the Sorrows of Werter in his bosom. Finding that he was stark mad with love and despair, my father was apprehensive that the police reports of the Morning Herald would acquaint us some day with the melancholy circumstance of his having taken the altitude of the central arch of Westminster Bridge; so my poor brother's trunks were packed *up*, and his disconsolate self *off*, before he had time for remonstrance."

"So much the better for him," observed Sir Comyne; "even though he should still venture on a personal inspection of the waters of the Elbe. Immediate drowning is preferable to hanging next season; which would have been poor Frederick's inevitable destiny. Lorimer is far too sensitively honourable a fellow to put up with a giddy flirting wife."

“ Oh ! fie—Sir Comyne ! ” interrupted Emily Lorimer, a young lady who always dealt in the ultrissimo of superlative. “ I assure you the object of Frederick’s attachment is the most delightful girl in London!—so accomplished, so entertaining!—in point of fashion there is nothing like her!—In short we all adore her; and if there had been any fortune on *her* side, or had my eldest brother been the lover instead of Fred. no possible objection could have been formed to the match. But Pa thought that a *ménage sans six sous*, would not prove *sans souci*; and therefore refused his consent ! ”

Having applauded this piece of obsolete wit, Sir Comyne turned for further explanation of the conclusion of poor Frederick Lorimer’s precipitate love affair, to Mr. Ducie; who had been parrying, in the interval, the attacks of the fair Gertrude, on his lazy avoidance of balls, and his steady appearance at all the humdrum dowager-parties, such as those of Lady Dyne-vour.

“I assure you,” said he, “I ground my public and social conduct upon the strictest principles—*of selfishness!* Having the constitutional misfortune to dance like an Otaheitan, I am always unwelcome as a partner;—while at these dull parties, which so few young men condescend to patronize, I increase in value cent. per cent. I find no lady here creeping away into another room to avoid my approach, as she would at Devonshire House, or any other *Académie Royale de danse et de musique*;—among a tribe of old members, country baronets, and whist-playing mummies of the middle ages, I become quite a “Triton of the minnows.”

Gertrude Lorimer, like his Majesty’s lower House of Parliament, was somewhat impatient of long speeches of explanation; and had already turned her attention towards some lighter flirt—some one better inclined to garnish his *because* with a few personal compliments towards herself;—and Sir Comyne Wallace seized on the opportunity to draw Ducie aside for further

interrogation. The pressure of the crowd still, however, prevented their escape beyond the reach of the attentive Mary's delicate auricular organization.

“What is all this history about Lorimer?—The last time we both supped with you at The Travellers, he appeared enchanted with his prospects.”

“Unfortunately his exultation proved premature, and realized the definition of an English summer, “three fine days and a thunder-storm.”

“And what brought about the final explosion?”

“The overcharged electricity of the paternal atmosphere.”

“A truce to metaphors, ‘an thou lovest me.’”

“Well, then, in the simplest possible English—a thing *you* seldom condescend to use—Frederick pleaded guilty of flagrant love and folly, in the course of one of his father’s pompous cross-examinations;—in consequence of which

plea, Lord Lorimer condemned him, on his own evidence, to transportation for three years to some German university.”

“ His original sentence, if I remember. But tell me ! did the unhappy convict resign himself to the hulks, without any further attempt to secure a companion for his miseries ?—Surely there was some notion of an elopement ? ”

“ So Lorimer flattered himself; and an old uncle, who hoards his guineas among his chalk hills in Bedfordshire, having presented him with a few hundreds towards the purchase of his Leyden Classics, he tried to persuade the fair Eleanor to come and live with him on *sauerkraut* and *kalbsbraten*, upon an allowance of five hundred a-year.”

“ A goodly prospect.”

“ I watched them both during supper one night at Lisborough House, while he was presenting these savoury images to her mind.—I wish you could have beheld her countenance and his.”

“ I imagine that Miss Willingham’s overflowed with indignation at such a barbarous proposal.”

“ On the contrary!—the indignation was all on poor Fred.’s side of the question. As to the fair Eleanor, she did nothing but laugh;—and seeing Lorimer’s handsome face vary from the tender to the sublime—from the sublime to the persuasive—from the persuasive to the astonished—from the astonished to the indignant—and from the indignant to the magnanimously disdainful—I was quite placable when he woke me out of my beauty-sleep at nine o’clock the following morning to make his confessions, and explanations, and adieus.”

“ And were they tremendously lachrymose?”

“ By no means; Lorimer was as indignant as Achilles—railed at the sex in general—and Miss Eleanor in particular;—reviled a Parisian education as the cause of his woe—and——”

“ But did he *explain* the mystery?”

“ There was no mystery in the case ?—‘ ’Tis an old tale, and often told !’—Miss Willingham begged to assure him that she thought him a very agreeable, gentlemanly personage — to dance with ; but that neither he, nor love, nor matrimony, had ever for a single moment occupied her serious thoughts. She even recommended him, as a friend, to dismiss, on all future occasions, the idea of a love-match from his mind ; as being the poorest bubble that ever floated in the chaos of a human understanding ;—made him a low curtsey—wished him a pleasant journey, and left him planted, while *she* went off to dance with some booby Baronet —a certain Sir William Wyndham, to the best of my remembrance.”

“ And thus ended poor Lorimer’s eternal passion of a month’s duration !—Poor fellow !—He is too single-hearted and excellent, himself, to be trusted unarmed among the herd of worldly, scheming, artful girls, with whom you and I, Ducie, may peril our hands and

hearts without dread of defeat.—Poor Lorimer ! —I fear he has too much feeling not to suffer deeply from this disappointment.”

“ *I do not fear it,*” observed Mr. Ducie, moving away. “ I sincerely hope, on the contrary, that he has had a bilious fever, and will have a slow recovery ; for it is a lesson that will be useful to him as long as he lives.”

Poor Mary trusted she did not smile too evidently during the continuance of this gratifying colloquy. It was the first regular explanation of the affair that had yet reached her. Frederick had not quitted England without dispatching a few words of agonized farewell to “ the sister of his dearest friend,” but the mysterious billet had unfortunately chanced to fall into the hands of Lady Willingham, who, referring its inexplicable tenderness personally to her daughter—and her daughter’s refusal of Sir William Wyndham to Mr. Lorimer’s incoherent eloquence—acted as many other prudent mammas would have done. In the absence of

a fire, she tore both note and envelop into delicate strips; rolled them into slender *allumettes*; and deposited the inflammable collection in the taper-stand of her own dressing-room for immediate use.

Lord Lorimer, meanwhile, had studiously cautioned his gentle wife and giddy daughters against any betrayal of “that ass Frederick’s cursed folly, to the family of his estimable friend, Sir Joseph Willingham;”—and Eleanor and Claudia were so thoroughly intent upon appropriating the proprietor of Wyndham Park as an accessory to the Duke of Lisborough—and so much in terror of making this little piece of domestic treachery manifest to their cousin—that they exerted all their ingenuity to avoid her visits and mistime their own. And thus Mary had endured ten very uneasy days—ten restless nights; and had been in far greater danger of the bilious fever and the slow recovery advocated by Mr. Ducie, than the roving Frederick himself. She had occasionally met

her cousins at evening parties since his departure ;—*his* name, of course, had never passed the lips of either ; but she had read upon Eleanor's triumphant brow, and in her sparkling eyes, confirmation strong of all her own secret apprehensions. She was convinced that nothing but the consciousness of plighted love, and an auspicious, though secret engagement, could be the origin of her visible joy and self-content ; and as a future Mrs. Frederick Lori-mer—living on love and law in lodgings within the narrow limits of Boswell Court—she contemplated her cousin prospectively, as the happiest and most enviable of human beings.

Nor was the delight with which she listened to a recapitulation of Eleanor's base and heartless desertion of poor Frederick, unmixed with commiseration for himself, and indignation against the jilt. But Mary Willingham, with all her virtues, was but human after all. She was quickly consoled—quickly recovered her serenity of mind ;—nay ! so deeply did she at

length exult that her dear brother's bosom friend should have escaped the snares of a coquette, and the dangers of a heartless and worldly-minded companion for life, that, during Mr. Ducie's explanation, her usually pale cheek became flushed with the deepest crimson, and her eyes sparkled with so brilliant an air of triumph, that many persons present pronounced Mary Willingham that evening to be as handsome as either of her beautiful cousins; and more than one of the Misses Lorimers' suite of detrimentals requested to be favoured with a presentation to their lovely friend.

But Mary had not the smallest genius for being a beauty. She preferred at all times being approved to being admired; and now that Frederick was gone—whose fickle taste might have been in some measure directed by the finger-post of the world's adoration—she was perfectly contented to remain unnoticed in the shade. She had long been aware of the insufficiency of her charms to attract and retain

those affections in which alone she wished to claim a part;—and her recent apprehensions having now subsided, she was satisfied to congratulate herself on Mr. Lorimer's escape from a giddy coquettish wife, without indulging in any vain ambition of conquests for herself.

“Only conceive ! dearest Mary,” exclaimed Gertrude Lorimer, turning suddenly towards her, “here is Lady Dynevour quietly assembling us to yawn at each other, and old Lady Monteagle fighting over the chances of the odd trick ;—and neither of them have the least idea of poor Lady Stapylford’s disasters.”

“Lady Stapylford ?—what has occurred to her ?”

“To *her*, nothing ; but that wild boy, Montagu, Mr. Willingham’s and Frederick’s precious *protégée*, has been expelled from Oxford ;—and Lord Stapylford, who has always been kept in the dark with regard to his son’s excesses, has been so greatly shocked by this very unexpected exposure, that he is suffering from an

attack of spasmodic gout, and his life is despaired of."

"I fear Mr. Stapylford is preparing a long series of misfortunes for himself and his parents," said Mary, thoughtfully. But at that moment Lord Lorimer and General de Vesci—who had been nailed to the whist-table all the evening—approached the young ladies. His Lordship was, as usual, most assiduous to his friend Sir Joseph's amiable daughter; a courtesy which Mary was wholly at a loss to interpret. Lord Lorimer, indeed, was an enigma to her comprehension;—she knew not how to reconcile the tale she had recently heard respecting his opposition to Frederick's union with her cousin Eleanor, and the exhibition of tender sensibility she had herself witnessed, and referred at the time to his unqualified approval of the match. She knew him to be a very courteous and courtly man in general;—fond of as much idle popularity as can be won by affable bows and universal civility;—and had she pre-

viously doubted the fact, her opinion would have been confirmed, in the present instance, by his deameanour towards the equally urbane General, respecting their common relative—Lady Maria Willingham.

“ I do not see your charming nieces here to-night, General de Vesci. My friend and kins-woman, Lady Maria, is one of those prudent mothers who are wise enough to economize on the beauty of their offspring. Mere homely girls may run from party to party, and fly from ball to ball ;—their absence or their presence remains equally unnoticed. But Lady Maria is well aware that Miss Claudia and Miss Eleanor are not to be lightly passed over ; nobody could remain in doubt whether the Miss Willinghams were seen to grace such and such a *fête*. Their mother does well not to render their appearance a too general favour.”

“ I should have thought,” replied the General, with a government-house bow, and quite mistaking his meaning, “ that any society graced

by your Lordship's daughters, would have done honour to my nieces. I detest finery and affectation ; and Lady Maria is, in fact, under serious obligations to Lady Monteagle—such as ought not to have permitted her to dispense with an appearance at Lady Dynevour's party.”

“I assure you, General de Vesci,” good-naturedly interrupted Mary Willingham, “that Lady Maria and her daughters formed the chief ornaments of the room, while you were engaged at whist in the early part of the evening. They were accompanied by Sir William Wyndham ; and were obliged to go away to Lady Robert Lorton's.”

“To Lady Robert Lorton's !” ejaculated the General, secretly delighted by this announcement. “Now that is the very thing of which I complain.—What attraction ought a new friend, or rather a new acquaintance, such as Lady Robert Lorton, to offer in competition with the claims of an old country neighbour ?”

“I had understood that there existed a family

relationship between the houses of Lorton and De Vesci."

The General had now gained his point. "Certainly, my Lord ! certainly ;—James, the thirteenth Duke, and seventeenth Earl of Lisborough, being son to Lord Adolphus Lorton, by Mildred, the daughter of John, fourth Earl of Chesterville, whose mother was a De Vesci!"

This valuable intelligence being partly addressed to Mary, she thought it polite to acknowledge its importance by a grateful bow ; much marvelling at the same time that any human memory could be so ill furnished, as to find lumber-room for such a tissue of obsolete trash. Not so Lord Lorimer ; *he* was quite a curiosity-hunter of minor incidents—loved an Anno Domini to his very heart—could date all the existent Peerage to a month and a day ; and entertained so singular a partiality for the perusal of proper names, that he always employed the half hour preceding a procrastinated dinner, in reading the Red Book, or the Court Guide ;

nor did he ever pass over the weekly Morning Post list of Lady Sefton's or Lady Salisbury's assemblies—especially the latter, which generally included himself and his family.

“Under these circumstances, General, we will not blame the young ladies for seeking a society at once so distinguished and so fascinating as that of Lady Robert Lorton. Besides—if public and newspaper report is to be credited—which, by the way, requires in most modern instances an extraordinary stretch of credulity—an alliance in the present generation is likely to renew the earlier consanguinities of the respective ancestors of the De Vescis and the Lortons. Permit me, my dear Sir, to offer you my felicitations on an event so gratifying to every common relative of Miss Claudia Willingham and Lady Maria.”

The General affected, in reply, that peculiar smile of conscious unconsciousness with which diplomatists attempt to conceal their total want of information on any subject of importance.

“The Duke of Lisborough was to have met my niece and her daughters at dinner at my house on Thursday last,” said he, evasively, and omitting to state that the “*was to have met*” consisted simply in an invitation and a refusal. “But his Grace was so eager concerning his friend Lord Barringhurst’s amendment in the House of Lords, that we were forced to resign the pleasure of his company.”

“My cousin, Claudia, and Lady Barringhurst, have recently become extremely intimate,” observed Mary.

“Aha!” said the delighted General, “*that* indeed explains the business. Mrs. De Vesci’s relatives, Sir Robert, Sir Thomas, Sir Richard, and Sir Hew Westland, suggested some such motive for his Grace’s absence. Men of the world, like the Westlands, are always familiar with those little rumours of society.”

Lord Lorimer, who despised the whole tribe of Westland with all the force of his aristocratic hauteur, regarding them as the mere counter-

ocracy of city honours, bowed with an air of lofty superiority. He was quite aware that such people as the Westlands give excellent dinners, maintain showy equipages, and purchase country seats well thinned of their timber by some former spendthrift proprietor ;—but with respect to their acquaintance with the *on dits* of society—saving such frothy scum as floats on the surface of the clubs—his Lordship entertained an opinion of his own.

“ I hope Mrs. De Vesci is well ? ” interposed Mary Willingham, embarrassed by the pause occasioned by Lord Lorimer’s deliberate sneer.
“ I do not see her here to-night ? ”

“ Mrs. De Vesci has unfortunately so long accustomed herself to the luxurious habits of a more enervating climate, that she finds it difficult to rouse herself after dinner sufficiently for the habits of general society. On the present occasion, she had wholly overlooked the date of Lady Dynevour’s obliging invitation.”

“ Stupid old dormouse ! ” thought Lord Lo-

rimer: but he only observed aloud, but aside to Mary, “ Ah ! my dear Miss Willingham ! it is not every lady of any age who emulates *your* admirable habits of domestic activity. My son Frederick has made me intimately acquainted with the excellent customs of Heddeston Court; —they made a deeper impression upon his young mind than you are probably aware of. Poor Fred. was very much to be pitied in leaving England at the present crisis;—let me trust, however, that he will not be wholly forgotten during his absence. I am anxious to persuade my friends, Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham, to visit Lorimer Park in the course of the summer, in order that my girls may find before their eyes a model of all that is graceful and praiseworthy in their own sex. I am anxious that the Miss Lorimers should continue to cultivate the friendship which you have hitherto condescended to bestow on their brother.”

Mary, touched and embarrassed beyond her own control, blushed and bowed, and bowed

and blushed again. She could not at all understand the drift of Lord Lorimer's politeness ; but she had reason to believe that its exuberance was sufficiently hypocritical ; and had he not been Frederick's father, it is probable that she would have descended Lady Dynevour's staircase with the impression of having been engaged in conversation with a very contemptible personage.

CHAPTER II.

The lovely oligarchs of our gynocracy !
You may see such at all the balls and dinners,
Among the proudest of our aristocracy ;
So gentle, charming, charitable, chaste—
And all by having tact as well as taste.

Byron.

Is it wonderful that the young and the gay and the brilliant, should fly from society of this common-place and twaddling description to a coterie such as that of Lady Robert Lorton ?—from whist to *écarté*—from quadrilles to the mazurka—from turbans and India shawls to *coiffures à la Courlande*, and *robes à la Marie Mignot*—from twice and thrice-told tales to the *bon-mots* of Lord Grandville, or the original anecdotes of Mr. Tichborne ?—from the cere-

monious formality of Dowagers, male and female, to the luxurious and high-bred ease of a Lady Barrington and a Lady Rachel Verney?

The Willinghams, who were estimated, in old Lady Monteagle's matter-of-fact and provincial set, only at the rate of their fifteen hundred per annum, were welcomed into the little diamond *bouquet* in Arlington-street with the eagerness befitting their united powers of enhancing its brilliancy. Lady Barbara Desmond paused in the midst of her flirtation with Lord Cosmo Somerset, to blow a kiss to the two lovely girls, whom she might naturally have regarded as dangerous rivals. Sir George Wolryche—who had been guarding a little treasure of Parisian scandal to do honour to their arrival—accompanied them towards Lady Robert's own especial divan; Lady Barrington extended her hand to Lady Maria with her usual fascinating air of gentle friendliness, while Henry Mulgrave attempted to attract her

daughters towards the music room, where Lady Desmond, and several other amateurs, were attempting the score of a new opera of Spontini's, which had just arrived from Berlin among some equally important diplomatic despatches. The party was not large; but it consisted of persons on such excellent terms with each other, that every one was occupied, and no one listless. *Chacun y trouvait sa chacune*, and consequently no one was missed or wanted. One lady, indeed, gazed vainly and discontentedly around her for an absent knight;—but alas! *he* was no Paladin of her's—as was proved by the sequel.

Eleanor Willingham, who had obtained permission from her dear friend, Lady Robert, to bring with her the stupid Sir William Wyndham—on whom she was now intent to try the whole battery of her charms—drew towards her Ladyship's little colloquial knot, to thank her for the favour; which was in fact one of no small account from a person so exclusively ex-

clusive in her circle of acquaintance. But as Eleanor accepted the seat vacated for her by Lord Grandville, it appeared to her discriminating ear and eye that her arrival had interrupted some subject of previous discussion. This suspicion, however, neither intimidated nor perplexed her mind. Lady Robert Lorton was a person of such irreproachable good faith, that those *really* honoured by her friendship felt their interests and their characters to be safe in her hands. No envy, no jealousy, no malice ever tempted her to treachery; and Eleanor Willingham was satisfied that nothing more offensive than some unpleasing piece of intelligence was thus guarded from her participation.

“ Only imagine, dear Eleanor, the folly of that restless Lady Radbourne,” exclaimed Lady Robert Lorton, changing the subject of conversation by a somewhat syncopical transition. “ You know how laboriously she has been attempting to force the condescension of her ac-

quaintance upon me. Last year, at Worthing, she sent me a long explanatory billet to the hotel, which poisoned all its inmates with *frangipane*, imploring me to carry off my sweet little angels to Hastings or Brighton without delay, or that the measles would save me all further trouble of their removal.—‘ As a mother herself, she thought it her duty to inform me that she had ascertained beyond a doubt, that Nos. 3, 7, and 19, in Wellington Buildings (where my Ladyship’s lodgings were said to be engaged), had been recently affected with measles in their several nurseries.’ ”

“ How very friendly!—how very amiable!” involuntarily exclaimed the matter-of-fact Sir William Wyndham.

Eleanor blushed for the density of her lover; and Lady Robert turned to examine her unsophisticated guest with an air of profound amazement, highly amusing to Lord Grandville.

“ Of course you were all gratitude for an attention so free from officiousness,” said he,

sarcastically, “ and returned a visiting ticket with your answer to the little note scented with frangipane.”

“ You know me better!” replied Lady Robert, laughing. “ Besides, a card bearing written evidence of its emanation from the infected locality of Wellington-buildings, would have driven poor Lady Radbourne’s maternal sensibilities to distraction. No!—I braved the peril of the measles, and the far greater peril of making her acquaintance—and for my valour’s sake escaped both; although my donkey cart ran against her barouche and four on all the roads; and although she used to toady my Italian greyhound whenever she met me on the sands. She even took the liberty of giving my two poor boys an indigestion, by stuffing them with indiscriminate pine-apple ice in a provincial confectioner’s shop in the dog-days.”

“ I believe the shops at Worthing are reckoned very good,” again judiciously interposed the Kentish Baronet.

“ Nothing but a Medea would condemn her offspring to promiscuous confectionary in this land of chemical substitutes,” said Lord Grandville, gravely. “ Muriatic acid and corrosive sublimate form the staple material of our *pralines* and *gimblettes*.”

The Baronet was stultified ; for the gimblets of his own acquaintance were formed of wood and metal, and pretended to no qualities beyond those of acupuncture.

“ And what is Lady Radbourne’s new manœuvre ?” inquired Eleanor. “ Has she advanced openly—or have you discovered her lurking in ambuscade ?”

“ This morning Rosalie woke me out of a delicious dream, to present me with a billet upon blue satin paper, covered all over with vignettes. I started from the horrid spectacle as if it had been an implement of destruction!—but concluding it an application from some of Lord Robert’s Welsh constituents for one of my vouchers for the next charity ball, or perhaps

an answer to my advertisement for a nursery governess, I bade Rosalie open, and read it to me."

"*Apparemment c'est quelque galanterie anonyme qui s'adresse à Miladi,*" said poor Rosalie, forgetting that she is no longer an inhabitant of the *Chausée d'Antin*. " *Car le billet est accompagné d'un Boa magnifique ; et cependant je ne trouve nulle part le mot de l'énigme.*"

"Accompanied by a Boa—why surely Lady Radbourne never dreamed of presenting you with a *cadeau*, by way of bribing you to know her?"

"Not quite so bad—but very nearly ! The billet explained to me that poor Lady Radbourne, who seems to be short-sighted as well as ill-bred, had unfortunately brought away this luckless Boa in mistake for her own, from Mrs. Grandison's ball ; and instead of returning it to the groom of the chambers, as any one else would have done, it appears that she has been exhibiting it to all her morning

visitors, for the chance of having it owned—or more probably for the advantage of severally acquainting them that she had been included within the ring-fence inclosing Mrs. Grandison's semi-savage horde."

" So that having attempted to convict every other human being in London of feloniously appropriating her property, she has at length been driven, as a last resource, to fix her suspicions on Lady Robert Lorton."

" Never venture to anticipate the *bonne bouche* of such a narrative as mine!—You are still wide of the mark. She assures me, in the blue satin billet, that one and all of these odious morning visitors of hers have conspired to assert that nothing so beautiful, so elegant, so valuable, and so distinguished as the unlucky Boa thus peremptorily forced into her possession, was ever seen within the bills of mortality, saving upon my Ladyship's shoulders; and Lady Radbourne furthermore declares, that she has deprived herself of rest and food, in

order to accelerate its restoration to its rightful owner."

"Lady Radbourne appears to be blessed with the gift of circumlocution."

"Endowed with the supereminence of human folly!" exclaimed Lady Robert. "I had the tact to ascertain, however, by a shop-ticket still clinging to the extreme extremity of the tail, that the Boa had been purchased of Maradan;—and of Maradan I learned, without evasion, that it was bought in as a bargain by Lady Radbourne herself only yesterday morning; plainly proving, by these means, that this would-be fine lady considered my acquaintance worthy purchase by the sum total of fifteen guineas and a—falsehood."

"I should rather imagine," observed Lord Grandville, "from *such* a standard of valuation, that poor Lady Radbourne is the strictest economist in London."

"And how did you evade this notable springe?" inquired Eleanor.

“ So bold a measure of impertinent ill-breeding demanded very little consideration on my part—so I sent her back her purchase by the hands of Lord Robert’s Irish groom, who is capable of communicating the perfume of the stables to every object he touches, or even looks upon.”

“ Without one little line in answer to the *billet à vignettes*? ”

“ With Lady Robert Lorton’s compliments and assurances that she had not worn such a thing as a Boa for several years past.”

“ Poor Lady Radbourne!—what a grievous pity that she could not be

Content to dwell in decencies for ever,

in the rural shades of her beautiful park!—She has not the smallest talent for the profession of fine ladyism; and her laborious and ineffectual efforts to display the barest shoulders in the best society in London, only tend to render her ridiculous. If not exactly destined to ‘ chro-

nicle small beer,' she is at least admirably adapted to chronicle *iced* claret and *hot* sauterne for the suppers of her provincial balls. And she will contrive to distinguish herself through life by breaches of the peace of fashion."

"I trust she may learn to distinguish herself by nothing worse," observed Lord Grandville. "A woman so covetously greedy of the follies of the day may, perhaps, ultrafy some day or other in a less blameless path to notoriety."

"We have no right to anticipate evil!" said Lady Robert, with a gesture of languid impatience. "Let us laugh at Lady Radbourne—for her labours demand some such sort of recompense. But she is a good mother, and, as far as I know, a good wife and a good woman; and may therefore claim exemption from the tax of personal scandal."

"Dearest Lady Robert!" exclaimed Henry Mulgrave, who had approached unperceived in the course of the Radbourne anecdote, "be

merciful, and dissolve the spell by which you have enchanted Miss Eleanor Willingham to your side. We cannot get on in the music-room without her baritone to perfect the most exquisite quintette that ever breathed its harmonies on mortal ears!—Lady Desmond has been singing for *two* this half hour past; but her powers are limited to this bi-vocal exertion.—Have I your sanction to convey Miss Willingham as a prisoner through yonder ‘traitor’s gate?’”

“ Go, love!” said Lady Robert. “ I will allow twenty minutes for your bright genius to blunder on towards perfection; and when I consider that your quintette has had time to become endurable to ears polite, I will follow you to the music-room, and enact audience with all fitting forbearance and partiality.”

Eleanor rose to accompany Mr. Mulgrave. “ I do not think your sister is well,” whispered he, as the door-way of the music-room brought

them for a moment into nearer contact. “Take no notice of my warning, but pray devote your kind attention to her support.”

Eleanor Willingham laughed at this solemn admonition. “I never saw Claudia in better health, or higher spirits,” said she. “We have been riding together all the morning—the heat was oppressive, and she may have possibly over fatigued herself.”

Henry Mulgrave shook his head with an incredulous smile. “*I* tell you that she is ill,” he replied; “and time, I fear, will accredit my medical skill.”

On reaching the pianoforte, Eleanor Willingham—however astonished, however reluctant—was secretly obliged to admit the reasonableness of the officious Mulgrave’s prognostications. Claudia, who had left her side scarcely half an hour before—calm with the even temperature of a heart at ease, and beautiful both from nature and from the gratifying consciousness of general admiration—had acquired, during

her sister's absence, an air of feverish anguish, such as rarely disfigures a brow, at once so lovely and so young. She had been singing;—she was still smiling and talking;—but Eleanor saw in a moment that something was terribly wrong.

Approaching her sister with affected unconcern, and gradually edging her way through the flirtation of Lord Cosmo and Lady Barbara, and the less overt but equally intimate intercommunication between Mr. Tichborne and Lady Barrington, Eleanor whispered a few words of eager inquiry. “Dearest Claudia! what has happened?”

“ *Happened!*—what *should* happen?—unless a grievous massacre committed by our united inexperience upon the beauties of this lovely new opera!” said she aloud.

“ Claudia—Claudia! this to *me*?—You are agitated beyond the power of controul or disguise.”

“ Hush! hush!—for worlds do not let these

people suspect for a moment that my calmness is assumed!"

" You distract me by this mystery."

" Once more let me implore you to forbear! This is no scene, and no moment for explanations.—Lady Desmond! my sister is petitioning for leave to divide your labours;—Mr. Mulgrave, Eleanor is eager to attempt the intricacies of the tenor part, which ought to do justice to your beautiful bass."

Eleanor, shocked to perceive by how violent an effort her sister attempted to subdue the tumult of her feelings, and completely in the dark as to the origin of their excitement, could scarcely command her voice to acquit herself creditably of her part in the concert;—and although Sir William Wyndham, who had assiduously followed her into the music-room, repeatedly assured her that her voice was much higher, and lower, and louder, than that of the celebrated Miss Tomkins, of Drury-lane Theatre, she was fully aware that she had been heard to

great disadvantage among the performers. Affecting an anxiety to examine the score of the new opera, she hung over the music-book with a view to conceal her tremour and perplexity; and while apparently engrossed by the interest of its minims and crotchetts—its *adagios* and *animatos*—she contrived to overhear the broken fragments of a conversation between Sir George Wolryche and Sir Comyne Wallace—who had just arrived from Lady Dynevour's party—which served in some measure to unravel the root of the mystery.

“ But what could they expect of such a silly boy as Vallerhurst ? ” observed Sir Comyne. “ He was sent abroad by his family to wean him from such drunken school-boy follies as breaking lamps—charging the watch—overturning mail-coaches—and getting into promiscuous quarrels at Stevens's. Did they expect that he would improve his classical scholarship by a perusal of all the *cartes* of all the

cafés in Paris?—or his judgment by pelting sugarplums at the Carnival?"

"I do not suppose they cared much either for his wit or his wisdom. He is come of a race whose excesses generally consign them to the family-vault before they attain the age of twenty-five; and his guardians were accordingly anxious that Vallerhurst should marry as early as possible, and bequeath an heir to so precarious a line."

"To effect which they betroth him in his cradle, and send him to waste away the exuberant folly of his minority at a distance of fifteen hundred miles from his affianced bride!"

"Had he remained in England, he would probably have visited Gretna-green with his mother's maid. He always looked upon little Lady Anastasia as a bitter dose inflicted upon him by prescription;—and loathed her accordingly."

"And *who* did you say had been honoured by a seat in his britschka?"

“ *Britschka!*—you are dreaming, my dear Wallace!—I simply told you that he engaged a *felucca* at Naples; embarked for Corsica with a pretty little actress whom he had stolen away from the Tordinone, or some other minor theatre at Rome;—and they have since been married at Cagliari, by as legal a ceremony as was ever sanctioned by Doctors’ Commons, and both Houses of Parliament to boot.”

“ How cursedly absurd!—And when did the intelligence reach his guardians?”

“ Yesterday morning.”

“ And who are they?—his mother and maiden aunts?”

“ No! there is a turtle-eating Lombard-street Baronet—a Sir somebody Westland—by way of man of business; and poor old pottering Lord Bridgenorth—the Arkadian whom I suspect Noah threw overboard for prosing—by way of man of dignity. This hopeful couple had a cabinet-council of half a dozen hours’ duration to decide whether, and *how*, this deli-

cate dilemma should be communicated to the Burgoynes. But Lord Burgoyne had got the start of them!—having received the intelligence by the despatch-bag the day before, from the pen of our resident at Naples.”

“ And it followed that——”

“ That when Sir — Westland made his appearance at ten o’clock last night, and in a private audience, and with infinite pomposity communicated the catastrophe to Lord Burgoyne, and expressed his melancholy hopes that Lady Anastasia’s health would withstand the shock of her fatal disappointment—his Lordship had the triumph to reply, that having been already apprised of the delicate fact, his daughter had that morning accepted the hand of the Duke of Lisborough, who had been dining with them *en famille*, and was now sitting with the ‘Didone Abbandonata’ in the adjoining room.”

It was fortunate for Eleanor Willingham that the music of Sir William Wyndham’s

creaking shoes—the product of the most eminent Hoby of the Archiepiscopal city of Canterbury—approaching at that moment, served to drown her own irrepressible exclamation of surprise. The Duke of Lisborough and Lady Anastasia Burgoyne!—alas! poor Claudia!

“What could tempt him to select a little insignificant being, who will probably be lost under the shade of her own strawberry-leaves?” exclaimed Sir Comyne Wallace. “Poor Anastasia!—I shall always call her the *Duchessità*—for I am persuaded she will never expand into a full-grown, full-blown ‘woman of rank and fashion,’ as the newspapers phrase it. The Duke of Lisborough!—He who might have thrown the handkerchief to all that was loveliest and brightest and most fascinating in Europe;—he to condemn himself to the digestion of such a piece of

Mere white curd of ass’s milk!”

“I suspect that Lady Anastasia’s charm, in his Grace’s estimation, consisted in the very

insignificance you despise. He has been so accustomed to enact the parts of king, queen, and knave, in the Calmersfield pack ;—so used to the deference exacted by solitary bachelor supremacy, that it would not have suited him to find his future partlet crow too loudly. His Grace is a great monopolizer of minor prerogative ;—and poor little Burgoyne will not dispute his long-established rights and privileges.”

“Every man to his taste !—Give *me* a ripple on the waters to prevent utter stagnation !—Give *me* a breeze that is sometimes contrary, to disperse the impulses of health and animation over the surface of the land. A dead calm—a calm for life—is little short of moral extinction.”

“And what is to become of all the lions and the unicorns who have been fighting for the crown ? —what is to be the destiny of the fair Pretenders to the throne of Calmersfield ?—What says Lord Robert to the catastrophe of the farce ?”

“*Farce?*”—I would have you to know that he regards it as the most deadly of tragedies.

But hush!—You forget, in your strictures upon the lions and unicorns, that the little Willinghams are within bowshot of the arrows of your irony."

But Sir George Wolryche might have spared his caution. The latter part of his discourse had already been rendered inaudible to Eleanor, by the unmelodious movements of the present object of her own matrimonial manœuvres, and by the still less musical periods of his leaden eloquence. Sir William Wyndham, guided by the delicate tact which instigated all his sayings, and most of his doings, was delivering to her impatient ears his own version of the Vallerhurst and Lisborough romance; repeatedly assuring her that all the world had believed his Grace to be engaged—or at least deeply attached—to her charming sister; and expressing his earnest trust that Miss Claudia's affections had not been touched, nor her expectations unfairly excited, by the Duke of Lisborough's attentions. "In these times," Sir William delicately

observed, “disinterested love was of very rare occurrence ; men were apt to exact either rank or fortune, or both, in exchange for the liberty they resigned.”

To the high-spirited Eleanor, all this was killing *à coup d' épingles*; and she was in agonies of consternation lest the unhappy Claudia should overhear the well-timed and feeling oration of the man of Kent. Alas!—poor Claudia's auricular sense was blunted beyond the reach of Sir George Wolryche's wit, or Sir William Wyndham's dunderheaded sympathy. A mist of mind appeared to envelop every surrounding object; strange sounds and incoherent words rang in her ears. From the moment she had heard the names of the Duke of Lisborough and Lady Anastasia Burgoyne coupled by the report of persons only too intimately versed in their movements and projects, all other sounds appeared incapable of conveying a definite idea to her mind. Eleanor was apprehensive that her sister's abstraction and

self-abandonment must be as evident to the whole room as it was to herself;—she would have given worlds for the power of removing her unobserved from the circle;—and every lingering moment of their compulsory sojourn appeared an age to the impatience of her irritation.

She had yet to learn the true nature of Lady Robert Lorton's coterie. She had yet to learn the principles which govern the little republics of aristocratic selfishness;—that in the commonwealths of fashionable life, pleasures and not pains are brought for participation into the general stock;—that the sick lion and the miserable martyr of *bon ton*, are alike condemned to oblivion;—that in the general surprise excited by the announcement of the Duke's marriage, Claudia and her hopes had not once been thought of;—and that amid the joyous excitement of the scene and the hour, her sister's pale cheek and distracted brow were a matter of utter neglect, and utter indifference!

The sisters had, however, a scene and a trial to endure, compared with which the impertinent condolence of the world had been easy of encounter; and this was the first *tête à tête* explosion of Lady Maria's disappointment. Eleanor, who was deeply affected by her sister's condition, exerted her utmost eloquence in the cloak-room to persuade Sir William Wyndham to accept a seat in their carriage. Knowing that his presence would be a restraint upon her mother's violence, for at least half of their road towards Seymour-street, she persisted in assuring him that it was a rainy night—or that it would, could, should, or might rain;—she would not hear of his betaking himself to his cabriolet, which was in attendance. Poor Sir William, albeit somewhat astonished at the interest expressed by Eleanor in the state of his lungs, and his contingent chances of a rheumatic fever—knew not how to resist her imbeculous allurements; and almost before he was aware of it, he found himself rolling onwards towards the

celibatorial retreats of the Albany, in a rickety landau with three silent women, enacting mute audience to his apologies for the intrusion. In some admiration of their protracted silence, he bade them good night at the door of the porter's lodge ; but could his asinine ears have followed the murmur of their departing wheels, his wonder would have ceased long before they reached the turn of Clifford-street.

Had the Saville Row of those days presented its smooth surface of actual Macadamization, he might have admired the sudden burst of maternal eloquence with which Lady Maria Willingham immediately began to bewail the grievous destiny apparently menacing her patience with the inseparable society and maintenance of both her daughters !—During her long apprenticeship to worldcraft, she had acquired a habit of control over one of the vilest of tempers ; but, like other violent movements subdued by violent coercion, it burst forth at times to rage with redoubled fury. Regardless of the pain and mortification

personally endured by her daughters on the present occasion, she hesitated not to aggravate their vexation by a thousand degrading epithets ; assuring them that they had been a drawback upon her own comfort and happiness from the hour of their birth, and upbraiding their folly and mismanagement as having solely originated the failure of her favourite project.

“ She had forewarned them of the undeviating devotion required by the Duke ;—she had forewarned them against a too ready adoption of the habits of Lady Robert Lorton’s set, as being offensive to Lady Grayfield, the secret President of his Grace’s council—and irritating to the Duke’s selfish vanity—the mainspring of his Grace’s character. Yet they had laughed, waltzed, flirted with other men—with a set of mere idle, worthless detrimentals—in defiance of her admonitions ! They had made their original views upon the Duke apparent to all London—yet had wanted the force of character—the tact—the filial submission—requisite to carry their

designs into execution !—Miss Eleanor Willingham had chosen to show herself up, as open to the addresses of a contemptible younger brother such as Mr. Frederick Lorimer ; and Miss Claudia had condemned herself to eternal ignominy by an unavailing siege of Lisborough House ! Her uncle, General De Vesci, had told her from the first how the affair would end ;—her friend, Lady Monteagle, had apprized her that the whole world laughed at their plot ;—even the impertinent Westlands had suggested that the obstinacy of the young ladies would pre-assure them of defeat !—For the future, however, she renounced all interest in their concerns—all measures for their advancement—all hopes of their establishment. They had persisted in exposing themselves beyond the hope of redemption, and might meet the consequences as they could.”

A total expenditure of breath alone suspended Lady Maria’s harangue. Fortunately it sought not, nor would have brooked a reply ; for neither

of her daughters were capable of utterance. Let it not be supposed that they were weeping under a sense of her displeasure, or the alarm excited by her repeated assurances of having discarded them for ever from her affections. The high-spirited Eleanor was swelling with indignation ; and secretly resolving to accept Sir William Wyndham, whom she despised and detested, on his slightest hint of a proposal, in order to escape from such a home and such a mother ; and poor Claudia was aware of a tempest of maternal vituperation, “but nothing wherefore.” Her whole frame seemed paralyzed by the shock she had undergone ;—and when under her sister’s careful tending she retired for the night, she obeyed the injunctions of Eleanor with the submission of a child, and “ lay down in her loveliness,” with the marble immobility of a statue.

CHAPTER III.

Il n'y a point dans le cœur d'une jeune personne un si violent amour, auquel l'intérêt ou l'ambition n'ajoute quelque chose.

La Bruyère.

ELEANOR WILLINGHAM was an intelligent, and, in many respects, an amiable and generously-minded girl. She possessed in an unusual degree those excellent gifts and qualities which may be moulded into virtue by a good education. But from her very earliest hour, her heart had been seared and her mind degraded by the worldly maxims of her lady mother; and she had now no clearer notions of the moral and religious principles on which the respectable portion of mankind rely for their per-

sonal government, than a blind man of the hues of the rainbow. She loved her sister tenderly upon instinct; but as to all the rest of the world, she regarded them as puppets to be moved by the impulses of her own selfish cunning. Endowed by nature with a sensitive heart and vivid temperament, she had so thoroughly subdued their impulses by the paltry vanities of selfish egotism, that she would have allied herself without hesitation to any man capable of placing her at the head of a brilliant establishment, and gifting her with a fitting tribute of diamonds, plate, equipages, and precedence in society.

She rose, after a night of sleepless self-examination, neither softened, nor humbled, nor inclined to adopt a more modest and feminine course of existence; but nerved to bear with firm defiance the sneers of the world; and to redouble the activity of her measures with a view to the ultimate success of their matrimonial speculations. Such was the boldness of spirit and hardness of heart which the guidance

of a better mother might have exalted into moral courage!—into the noble fortitude that shrinks not from encounter with the allotted evils of life.

Her first object was to learn from the Morning Post what degree of publicity had been already thrown upon the intended alliance of the Duke of Lisborough. Her continental education had not prevented her from becoming aware that an English nobleman of any importance cannot be afflicted with the slightest cold, or afflict other people with the most boring of family dinners, without finding himself the immediate hero of a paragraph. In Italy, an event of this description would have furnished the gossip of the Opera-boxes for six months, without the chance of becoming public property; but in England, where newspaper literature forms a mental dram, whose stimulus is coveted from the palace to the village inn, it was inevitable, that the history of the “PROJECTED HYMENEALS IN HIGH LIFE” should come flying all abroad, on the wings of

all the journals, within four-and-twenty hours from the date of their original projection.

Miss Willingham was fortunate in obtaining a piece of consolatory intelligence from the very same newspaper that set forth the bulletin of the Duke's inconstancy. Lord Stapylford had breathed his last!—and she gratified herself with the consideration that Lady Monteagle and Lady Dynevour would be too busily occupied with their own bombazine and broad hems—with the jointure of the new Dowager and the delinquencies of the new Lord—to bestow their sympathizing tediousness upon their injured friends in Seymour-street; or their patient hearing upon Lady Maria's indiscreet Jeremiades, and unfeeling abuse of her children. Eleanor immediately resolved to procure, if possible, her aunt De Vesci as a listening-stock to the grievances of the day; being persuaded that *she* would nod in appeasing acquiescence with every murmur and every complaint; and forget every word uttered by

her irritated niece, long before she had reached the mahogany portals of her mansion in Portman-square. Her next measure was a visit of inquiry to Claudia's dressing-room, whom she had left in a leaden slumber, the result of laudanum; and whose mind she was becoming eager to excite to a spirit of self-sustainment equally courageous with her own. She had very little hope, however, of accomplishing so desirable an end. Claudia was naturally indolent and unresisting; easily depressed, and constitutionally timid.

What, therefore, was Eleanor's amazement on entering her sister's diminutive chamber, to find her seated before the glass in the last stage of Mademoiselle Celine's most elaborate efforts, in high spirits, and still higher beauty.

“Where have you been, dearest Nelly, at this early hour?”

“To the De Vescis’—to persuade our worthy old Sleepwalker to take Mamma a long airing in the suburbs. She will be here at two

o'clock, and we shall have the morning to ourselves."

" And to what purpose?—You might just as well have allowed her the satisfaction of a grumbling soliloquy at home. Lady Robert has written to offer us her horses to ride this morning; and to say that Lady Desmond and Barbara will call for us at four."

" How kindly arranged on her part!—There is nothing she resigns so reluctantly as her ride; and a canter on the turf was the very thing I was wishing to procure you, as the best remedy for a heavy head or heavy heart."

" You do me less than justice!—Believe me I am guiltless of either. However, I accepted Lady Robert's proposal with pleasure; offered her my congratulations in my note of thanks, and now I am prepared to appear both merry and wise, to all the morning visitors who may feel inclined to honour us, in the interval, with their scrutiny and criticisms."

" Thank God, I find you prepared to act with

so much promptitude, and so much proper pride," said Eleanor, affectionately kissing her orehead. But she started back on discovering that, in spite of her sister's healthful bloom and sparkling eyes, her brow was burning and beating with the unnatural pulsation of feverish excitement. She forbore, however, to comment on the discovery, for she perceived that Claudia was intent on deceiving the whole world; and suspected that perhaps she had succeeded in misleading her secret self, as to the nature of her own feelings.

On establishing themselves in the drawing-room, they had the comfort of perceiving that Lady Maria's vehemence had raved itself into sulky silence. She had composed her features into an air of patient martyrdom, and betook herself soon afterwards to the airing offered by Mrs. De Vesci, after the fashion of a saintly victim. Scarcely had she departed, when Lady Willingham arrived in all the exultation of gratified spite. She had not felt happy from

the moment that Mary had despatched her negative to Sir William Wyndham, until that which acquainted her that Lady Maria's ambition had been laid low in the dust, and that the conduct of Lady Monteagle's dissolute grandson had made itself the theme of newspaper commentation. She came prepared to hint, and insinuate, and condole;—and Mary, who was painfully aware of the ungenerous character of her mother's views on this occasion, had accompanied her solely in the intention of pouring balm into any wounds she might be tempted to inflict.

But scarcely were they seated when Claudia, without embarrassment or circumlocution, alluded to the Duke of Lisborough's marriage as the news of the day; assuring her aunt and cousin that Lady Anastasia Burgoyne was the most interesting girl in London;—that she would form a charming addition to the Calmersfield society;—and that from the moment of her presentation to them by their dear Lady Grayfield,

they had pointed her out as exactly the person calculated to become Duchess of Lisborough. Mary's cheeks became flushed with pleasure on discovering her cousin's feelings to be so differently affected from what she had imagined: Lady Willingham was fairly silenced and over-crowed by the boldness of her niece's *sang froid*; and even Eleanor herself was astonished. She had always relied far more upon her own tactics than upon those of Claudia, in the course of their domestic management; but she now felt inclined to resign the palm without further contestation.

Nor did her amazement decrease when she beheld Claudia, in all the brilliant triumph of her beauty, occupying the general attention of the fashionable group of equestrians to which they were attached for the afternoon. Indifferent to her usual apprehensions, she managed Lady Robert Lorton's spirited Arabian with the most fearless grace. Instead of the listless apathy she had accustomed herself to display,

since her arrival in England, to every one saving the favoured Lisborough, she had now assumed an air of joyous animation and general affability, which imparted a new character to her loveliness; and before they reached the extremity of the park, Lord Cosmo had deserted Lady Barbara Desmond's side; Sir George Wolryche's ringing laugh formed an unintermitting echo to her sallies—and Mr. Tichborne, detaching himself from Lady Barringhurst's party, which they encountered by the way, followed in the wake of the beautiful being whose equestrian grace he declared to be unrivalled, saving by the lovely Centauress of the Grecian gem.

Eleanor was delighted by this very unexpected triumph. She overheard the absurdity of the Duke of Lisborough's choice the topic of universal satire. Wolryche protested that Maraban was engaged in inventing satin leading-strings, and Mechlin bibs and tuckers for her Grace's *trousseau*;—and Henry Mulgrave de-

posed to having seen the model of a *bonbonnière* at Rundell's, on which the finest diamonds of the Lorton casket were to be set for her use. All the men of the party were congregated round Claudia ; and a place was consequently vacant at her own fair side for the monopoly of Sir William Wyndham, whose red face, blue coat, and buff waistcoat she soon saw advancing towards her, and who listened with some impatience to the Lisborough debate.

“ Don’t you think it very hard, Miss Willingham,” said he, with a solemn air and emphasis, “ that a man can’t marry according to his own liking, without being hauled over the coals in this sort of way ? ”

“ Hauled over the coals ! ” reiterated Eleanor, to whom the domestic idioms of England were not particularly familiar.

“ Without being brought to book by persons who have no right either to meddle or make in the business ? ”

Eleanor, who was aware that her honourable

friend was one of the most eminent “country gentlemen speakers” in the House, found herself rather puzzled by his eloquence.

“ For my own part,” resumed Sir William, “ I own myself to be Downright Dunstable ; and what I say is, that where friends are agreeable, and the young lady not averse, there is nothing like making hay while the sun shines ; and if the world chooses to have its laugh—why let it. If I could be married to-morrow after my own choosing, by Jupiter, I should care no more for the jeers of my club, than for a hard rain after harvest.”

“ The Duke of Lisborough has made a choice extremely gratifying to his family and friends,” observed Eleanor Willingham, anxious that the proposal, which she feared would follow the preamble, should be made in a somewhat less public position. “ Lady Anastasia Burgoyne is a niece of his sister, Lady Grayfield’s, and the Duke has known her from her infancy.”

“ Ay—ay ;—training and pedigree all in her favour !—to judge of the kitling you should know something of the cat and her breed. A vastly sensible woman is that Lady Grayfield—no flummery about her.—I sit next pew to her at church ; and I observe that she is not ashamed of making her responses as audible as the clerk’s.”

“ It is fortunate that all the congregation are not equally fond of hearing their own voices,” said Eleanor.

“ For my own part,” continued Sir William, replying to his own train of reflections, “ I *will* say that I abominate the sight of a real high-flying woman of fashion, with her rouge, and *écarté*, and flirting, and what not. Now, there’s that daughter of my worthy neighbour, Lady Monteagle—Lady Stapylford I mean ;—a fine kettle of fish *she* has made of it ! For full ten years after Margaret Monteagle married, it was Lady Stapylford here—Lady Stapylford there—who but Lady Stapylford !—Lady Sta-

pylford's new chariot at the birth-day—Lady Stapylford's masked balls—Lady Stapylford's diamonds at Carlton House—were as regular matters for newspaper discussion as the Slave Trade, or the annual debate on Emancipation. And all this time, how was her family going on, I should like to know?—My Lord was either at Newmarket, or playing hundred-guinea-whist, by daylight, at Brookes's;—her hopeful son was tying fireworks to his tutor's pigtail; and her half-starved servants, baulked of their board-wages, were forced to live on the venison and pine-apple left from her Ladyship's entertainments. The consequence is, that the Stapylford estate is mortgaged up to its ears; and when the young Lord comes of age, he will be obliged to sell his fine Yorkshire property, or completely strip the Stapylford Park woods to clear off his own scores with the Jews. And so much for the management of a woman of fashion."

"By your own account," said Eleanor, laugh-

ing at his vehemence, “ the blame, in this instance, lies chiefly with the *gentlemen* of the family.”

“ A bad wife is sure to make a bad husband. If the sun won’t shine, a fig for the crop.”

“ The present Lord Stapylford is a very fine young man.”

“ *Fine*?—a mere milksop; looks just like Madame Vestris in boy’s clothes in a farce. *Fine*? —a mere frivolous silk-worm !”

“ You do not appear partial to the family. I am surprised, however, to hear you tax Lord Stapylford with effeminacy ; for we hear of him constantly at Melton, at prize-fights, and steeple-chases. Lady Monteagle’s chief complaint against her grandson is that he prefers a rat-hunt to the opera.”

“ That is just a lady’s idea of manliness !—A lad, like Stapylford, has a whole stable of hunters put off upon him, which he cannot ride, either by some rogue of a horse-dealer, or some

greater rogue of a fashionable friend ; and down he goes to Melton to have them broke, or broke down, by all the crack riders of the hunt ; while *he* stays at home, drinking iced whisky punch, and playing hazard ;—having paid through the nose, with *post obit* bonds, for a stud which he scarce even sees till it comes to the hammer in a Spring sale at Tattersall's."

Miss Willingham, who perceived that Mr. Tichborne was lending a sly ear to this delicate investigation, would gladly have changed the topic of discourse ; but Sir William seldom bestowed his attention, except upon the mute arguments of his own mill-wheel of a mind.

" As to the prize-fights, rat-hunts, and steeple-chases, the boy knows as much about them as you do. He is taken there by his cursed rascals of tuft-hunting toadies—like a pigeon in a trap—only to be made a mark of ; and is brought back in a hack tandem, to an eight o'clock dinner at Long's, prating about

Jacko Mackacko, and a loser by some thousands on the long odds."

A sneer that passed between Tichborne and Lord Cosmo, as the echoes of this neat and appropriate discourse reached their ears, brought a blush of shame to the cheek of Eleanor Willingham. "When I become Lady Wyndham," thought she, "I must certainly borrow Papageno's padlock, to secure those boorish lips. At all events, I will take care to amend his taste for riding in the Park, or commenting upon the movements of civilized Christians."

"What party is that before us?" inquired Eleanor, aloud, of Lord Cosmo Somerset, resolved to divert the conversation into another channel.

"Oh! that is Lady Radbourne—obliged to hold on her hat while she bends her ear to poor old prosing Lord Botherby, whom she worships because his grand-daughter is a patroness of Almack's. I would hazard a bet that he is favouring her Ladyship with a topographical

plan of the riots of eighty; or resuscitating some pithy observation of ‘my esteemed friend, the late Charles Wyndham.’”

“ And that noisy set who are making a coasting tour of the Serpentine ?”

“ Do you not recognize old Lorimer, on his yeomanry charger, and his little pee-wits of daughters on their ponies ? He looks like a solemn seventy-four, convoying a fleet of cockle shells !”

“ Or like a gray gander, protecting his covey of goslings,” replied Eleanor. “ At the distance of a mile one might identify the cackling of the Lorimer gamut.”

“ I always fancied the Miss Lorimers were particular friends of your’s !” interposed the astonished Sir William.

“ They *are* friends, and distant cousins,” replied Eleanor calmly ; “ which is the reason I take the liberty of abusing them. I should be sorry to leave the foibles of my family in the hands of strangers.”

The sun was now sinking low—the Park was getting thin—and Sir William Wyndham hungry. “I have promised Lady Robert Lorton to escort you no further than her house,” said Lady Desmond to the Willinghams. “She wants you to dine with her; and has, I believe, procured your mother’s sanction, your maid’s assistance, and your evening dress.”

The girls, who desired nothing so eagerly as an escape from home, readily acquiesced; and as Sir William assisted Eleanor from her horse in Arlington-street, he failed not to breathe in her ear the ominous, but expected, whisper: “At what o’clock shall I find Lady Maria at home, to-morrow?”

“We are always visible at two!” replied Miss Willingham, blushing with disgust at the awkward assiduities of a man, whom she had already determined to accept as the wedded partner of her future life—as her inevitable companion through time and through eternity!

Ten minutes afterwards she had almost forgotten his existence, among the varied excitements and elegant joyousness of Lady Robert's fascinating circle.

CHAPTER IV.

I do not reserve all my compassion for the griefs that stalk in buskins. When people's griefs are of that dignity and public character, they can lay them in state, sing solemn dirges over them, inter them with funeral pomp, and set up a superb monument of them. They taste the "*luxury of woe*;" but the griefs that must be privately buried in the breast are the most bitter.

Mrs. Montagu's Letters.

THERE were various reasons which rendered the coterie in Arlington-street more than commonly agreeable on the day in question. The party was an *impromptu* ;—having been formed in the course of the morning, after Lord Robert's departure for his Buckinghamshire estate, where he was in the habit of enjoying

the first appearance of the May-fly every spring; and where, on the present occasion, he was bent upon the solitary enjoyment of his own ill-humour. It was highly improbable that the most speckled trout, or Leviathanic pike, would charm him from the remembrance of the forfeited reversion of a ducal coronet, and one hundred and twenty thousand per annum!

His good-natured but listless wife, who sympathized more with his affliction than with its motive, became suddenly anxious to disguise the real nature of his feelings. Summoning, therefore, all her enchantments around her, she improvised a little *fête*, as if in honour of the projected alliance of her brother-in-law; and as her indolent nature was positively excited and amused by the whole affair—by Lady Grayfield's able manœuvring, and Lisborough's easy dupery—she appeared in far more than her usual spirits, and exercised a double share of her usual fascinations. The

little circle, readily receiving the infection of her buoyant gaiety, and relieved from a high-pressure engine of dulness by the absence of Lord Robert Lorton, formed an electric chain, emitting sparkles of incessant brilliancy;—and Claudia and Eleanor, who had urgent motives for assuming an aspect of gladness, were not slow to contribute to the colloquial animation and varying diversions of the evening.

Bout-rimés, ballads (*mis en action*), acted charades, and proverbs, and *tableaux*, succeeded each other; till Lady Barbara Desmond, the listless Lady Barrington, Lady Rachael Verney, and even Mrs. Grandison, although usually vivacious and agile as a bird, cried eagerly for a respite; which was agreeably occupied by Henry Mulgrave and his guitar, Lord Cosmo Somerset's inimitable mimicries, Sir Comyne's lively anecdotes of other lands, and Mr. Tichborne's piquant edition of the scandals of his own.

It was an unpleasing interruption when the

carriage came to fetch them home;—to that home which was wearisome from its paltry mediocrity—loathsome as the parliament of their matrimonial plots and conspiracies—and awful at the present crisis as the den of the maternal tigress, whose irritations were appalling even to her kindred cubs. They prepared themselves to find the countenance of Lady Maria, on their return to Seymour-street, lowering and portentous as an April thundercloud !

Great and startling, therefore, was their delight, on finding themselves greeted as “her dearest children!” and caressed and flattered as tenderly as when basking in the warmest sunshine of their Calmersfield popularity!

“ You had a tolerably pleasant dinner at the General’s ? ” inquired Eleanor.

“ Very passable—far less boring than usual ;—and you, my love ? ”

“ *Our* party was delightful.”

“ Any thing new ? —any gossip of to-day ? ”

“ A ball at Lady Radbourne’s next week ;

and a majority against Ministers to-night in the Commons."

"What have we to do with such trash as Lady Radbourne, or the House?—My information has been more to the purpose."

Eleanor drew a chair towards the table, and affected to busy herself with the visiting tickets, the result of her morning's absence, which lay on the table in a gilded standish.

"Your uncle De Vesci—extremely enraged by the Duke of Lisborough's conduct, and somewhat touched by my hint that his own interference has been materially instrumental in our disappointment—has sent you a bank-bill for five hundred pounds, to provide against a very brilliant *fête* which he purposes giving immediately, in order that *we* may invite the company, and profit during the remainder of the season by the popularity it will purchase!"

"Five hundred pounds!—My dear Mamma! It is a perfect fortune!—Think of all the trinkets it will purchase!"

“In the next place I have the pleasure of informing you, that the Duke of Lisborough’s affairs are horribly involved ; that he marries Lady Anastasia Burgoyne chiefly for the temporary relief to be afforded by her fifty thousand pounds ; and that they are going abroad to economize, immediately after the ceremony.”

“Involved !—the Duke of Lisborough !—Impossible, my dear Mamma !—Consider for a moment his rent-roll and resources !”

“Consider also his profuse expenditure ;—his taste for building and *écarté*—and the strict entail by which his hands are tied. He has no command of ready money—no power of raising it except on ruinous terms—and the system of exorbitant interest once commenced, there is no end to its aggravation of evil. In short, Sir Robert Westland, who sat next me to-day at dinner, assures me that his Grace’s bonds are good for little or nothing in the city ; and that this silly marriage of his is generally regarded as a mere pecuniary arrangement.”

“Without yielding the least faith to such an opinion, I own I am delighted that it should prevail; for whether true or false, it renders a very satisfactory and healing balsam to Claudia’s feelings, and our own pride.”

“And in the third place, my dear Eleanor, I learned from Sir Peter Westland, the fat Commissioner, who never misses his trot round the Park, that Sir William Wyndham was your constant attendant this morning;—that your approaching marriage is the theme of general discourse; and that his estates in Kent average a clear twenty thousand a-year.”

“He is, without exception, the most ill-bred fool—the most self-opinionated boor I ever beheld!” exclaimed Eleanor, by way of probing her mother’s feelings.

“Now pray let me hear no fastidious nonsense of that description,” replied Lady Maria, peevishly. “A girl in your dependent situation should not presume to make exceptions;—for what would become of both you and your sister,

I should like to know, in case of my death? Do you think you should be happier or more respectable spunging as a poor relation at Heddington Court—or maintaining your own rank in life at the head of Sir William Wyndham's princely establishment?"

"—Loathing my husband—neglecting his children—and watching every day for an increase of plethoric symptoms on his full-moon visage, in the hope of approaching apoplexy!"

"Eleanor!—Eleanor!"

"I should certainly order his ale and soup to be annually strengthened, in the hope of accelerating the affair; or perhaps bring myself within reach of the penalties of the law, by tightening his white cotton cravat while he is snoring after a long day's run with the hounds."

"I cannot listen to these offensive rhapsodies;—such observations are infinitely disgusting."

"Will you listen to one which is considerably

more so in *my* estimation?—Will you listen to my assurance that I have firmly resolved to accept Sir William Wyndham; and that I have promised him a private audience to-morrow, at two o'clock, here—in this very house?"

"My dearest Eleanor!" exclaimed Lady Maria, rising and embracing her, "now you speak like a girl of sense and feeling, such as I always took you to be!—Accept him?—Who for a moment could doubt it?—So desirable a connection!—an unincumbered estate of twenty thousand a-year!"

"Unincumbered?—with that mass of mortality attached to the demesne?"

"My dear! I have the greatest respect for Sir William;—your poor dear father always looked up to Wyndham Park as the first property in the county;—always supported the late Sir Roger throughout his elections. Nay!—at one time they talked of setting up an opposition pack of fox-hounds between them. I am convinced that nothing would have

afforded poor dear Sir Charles, and even poor old Sir Claude, so much gratification as an alliance between one of their descendants and Wyndham Park."

" If that descendant, *like* the park, were a mere mass of clods, I could sympathize in their triumph. Unfortunately she chances to be endued with sensibilities which may hereafter render both the park and its proprietor very vexatious appendages."

" Now, my sweet Eleanor——"

" My dear Mamma!—with *you*—allow me to be candid!—I will play my part to admiration in presence of the world; but I shall revenge myself *on* myself by always confessing to my mother that I abhor and despise my husband."

" I will leave Sir William and his family diamonds to plead their own cause," said Lady Maria, affecting to laugh off her secret confusion and dismay at Eleanor's vehemence. " And now, my dear child, let me beg of you to go to bed, and compose your spirits, in order

that at Sir William's visit to-morrow, your own bright eyes may rival the brilliancy of his family diamonds."

" Claudia has been gone these ten minutes," replied Eleanor, deliberately lighting her candle, and kissing her hand to her mother. " I fear my poor sister's spirits will be more difficult of composure than mine."

On reaching her own apartment, Eleanor received from the smiling lips of Mademoiselle Celine a message from her sister, saying that she had retired to rest with a severe head-ache, and begged not to be disturbed; on which, having given her orders for the morrow, and dismissed her attendant, she threw herself into an arm-chair to indulge in half an hour's reverie—a circumstance of rare occurrence with the lively Eleanor Willingham. And whither strayed those visionary thoughts—to whom—to what—reverted her recollections—as she sat twining the raven tresses between her unconscious fingers, and strove to chide away the

blush that rose unbidden to her cheek?—Was it Frederick Lorimer's voice that seemed to tingle in her ears as she shuddered at the thought of the morrow's wooing?—was it *his* grace of person, *his* elegance of person, *his* playfulness of spirit that arrayed the uprising phantom, which appeared as if interposed between herself and happiness?—Did any whispered vows of youthful love steal back upon her soul as she clasped her hands together in sudden agony?—Yes! Frederick was avenged!—there were tears in her eyes—despair in her heart!—She felt that the happiness of her innocent youth was departing from her;—that she was about to sacrifice her own self-esteem—and for ever!

With hasty impatience she arose, and began hurriedly to disencumber herself of her evening ornaments. “For these, and baubles such as these,” murmured Eleanor, as she heaped them in glittering confusion upon her dressing-table, “I am about to renounce the peace and respec-

tability of my future existence. Henceforth no solitude—no communing with myself—no trust in my own rectitude!—*I* shall, my very self, be the first to appreciate the indelicacy, the knavery of my own conduct, and to despise Eleanor Wyndham as she will deserve to be despised.”

She started!—for a low moan of pain, or of distress, appeared to proceed from her sister’s adjoining chamber. Throwing on her mantle, she prepared to infringe upon Claudia’s prohibition:—in a moment she was standing by her bedside.

“ My dear—dear sister!” she whispered in a soothing voice;—but a faint murmur of despondency was still the only reply.

Astonished and alarmed, Eleanor returned into her own room for a light, which enabled her to perceive her afflicted sister sitting up in bed with an air of wild unconsciousness, and rocking herself backwards and forwards, as if to subdue the sense of pain.

“ You are ill ! dearest Claudia,” again whispered Eleanor, while the most terrible apprehensions took possession of her mind.

Claudia waved her head, as if in negative reply ; but neither spoke, nor discontinued her movements.

“ Speak—sister ;—tell me, I beseech you—what can I do to relieve you ?”

“ Nothing !” answered Claudia, in a hollow voice ; “ nothing—nothing !” and she smote her hands despairingly upon her bosom.

Eleanor, dreading that her sister’s reason was departing from her, threw herself upon the pillow behind her, clasped her in her arms, and drew her head gently towards her own bosom. “ My dear sister,” she faltered, “ remember that if you persist in this horrible silence, I must call for other assistance. Surely you would not wish that any one beside your own Eleanor should witness your present condition.”

But her kindness had more influence on the sufferer than her threats ; in a moment she

found the warm tears of Claudia falling upon her hands!—Again she pressed her sister's throbbing brow tenderly towards her. “ Claudia—Claudia !” she exclaimed, “ if you have any pity upon me—if you have any confidence in my affection, relieve my mind from its vague terrors.—What can have agitated you thus ?”

“ And do *you* ask me ?” faltered Claudia Willingham at length, with a gasping voice. “ Do you not know that he is about to be united to another ?”

“ The Duke—the Duke of Lisborough ?”

Claudia pressed her sister's hand in assent.

“ Good God ! and can disappointed ambition prevail thus over your reason ?—Can the loss of mere worldly distinction thus agonize a human heart ?”

“ Oh ! Eleanor !”

“ I can scarcely forgive you — Claudia, scarcely sympathize with you ! Surely a woman's pride ought to render her superior to such paltry weakness. Regard the affair as a game

of skill, at which you have been defeated, but do not waste your tears upon a matter of mere interest."

"Of *mere* interest!—how little do you know me!"

"Of what else;—you cannot have *loved* the Duke of Lisborough?"

Again Claudia Willingham smote her hands upon her bosom. "Fondly—passionately!" she murmured. "Yet till I was hopeless of return, I had rather died than own it."

Eleanor leaned back against the pillow in utter consternation. She could neither discredit nor comprehend her sister's assertion. "When we last spoke together upon this subject—" she began—

"It is very long since!" interrupted Claudia. "I remember it well—it was at Calmersfield. Three months form a period capable of changing the opinions or feelings of any woman."

"Yet you might have been more candid with

your sister ;—you might have acquainted me with your altered views as they gradually arose.”

“ I was in daily hopes of receiving some declaration from Lisborough, which might seem to excuse the unclaimed devotion of my heart towards him. And even *you*, Eleanor, ask yourself whether you were more explicit with *me*, relative to Frederick Lorimer and your intentions.”

“ My dear Claudia ! we have been both to blame,” replied Eleanor, frankly offering her the hand she had withdrawn in a momentary movement of vexation. “ But tell me, love—for all this is still incomprehensible to my mind—tell me, if it be not too painful to you, how long you have loved this odious man, and why have you hitherto so scrupulously concealed it from me ?”

“ Because I saw that you disliked and despised him. *I*, you know, Nelly, never was gifted with your talents ; I have always been less difficult and more forbearing than yourself, even in the choice of our acquaintance. In

Italy, I used to laugh and dance with the Duke of Lisborough, without distinguishing him from others, because I thought, and felt, and acted as a child ; and because at that time the ideas of love and marriage had never entered my head, except as things remote and visionary, and solely connected with our return to England.”

“ It is very true ;—and we were both happier then, were we not, dearest Claudia ? We lived but to amuse ourselves, without bestowing a care on these plots and cabals of Mamma’s, which *have* formed, and will form, our bane through life.”

“ It was in the same frame of mind we first visited Calmersfield. We saw every one labouring to attract the Duke’s attention ; and the probability of his bestowing his hand upon another, was the first thing that warned me of my own predilection in his favour. I remember well that a twinge of jealousy first betrayed my secret to myself.”

“Woul’ to Heaven you had never chanced to make so unfortunate a discovery!”

“I will not say that the favourable prejudice attached to his rank and brilliant position did not tend to heighten the character of my feelings, and to suggest the emulation with others by which I sought to attract and fix his notice. But from the time that I *did* attract it—from the moment that I fancied I *had* fixed it—I loved him for himself, and himself only!”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Eleanor, clasping her hands together with irrepressible vexation; “that empty, stupid, disagreeable man!”

Claudia laid a gentle but reproving hand upon her lips. “My dear sister! spare me! or I shall proceed no further with my confession.”

Eleanor kissed the cold hand thus interposed, and promised forbearance.

“No woman,” observed Claudia, “can judge of the merits or captivations of any man till he has appeared before her in the character of a lover. Had I seen and known Lisborough but

as he moves in general society, I should have continued to regard him as pompous, and tiresome, and uninteresting. But these visible defects arise less from his natural *hauteur* than from a degree of personal shyness which few suspect in him ;—which he cannot repress, and therefore attempts to veil under a mask of stately reserve. In his intimacy with myself he ventured to throw off that mask—to appear in his natural character—a character but too fascinating—too enchanting for my happiness.”

Again Eleanor made a movement expressive of impatience.

“ You may remember, Nelly, that at Calmersfield we two were always *tête à tête*, whether in its crowded evening *réunion*, or in the morning solitude of its walks and gardens. In these interviews, his heart—at least, I thought so then—was unreservedly laid open before me. He spoke to me of the hollow coldness of his position in the world—of the mistrust with which it inspired him—of the fastidious delicacy of his

feelings towards women, and of his dread of awaking from some dream of fancied affection, to find that it had been solely prompted by his extrinsic qualifications. I am persuaded that at that period he was both conscious of the existence of mine, and confident of the disinterestedness of its devotion."

"Fool! to fling away the possession of a jewel he so little deserved, and which will never be vouchsafed him from any other quarter!—But why, dear Claudia, why were you at that time so reserved with me on the subject?"

"I saw that you undervalued the Duke; and feared that you would persist in misinterpreting the nature of my own feelings. With Mamma I was more ingenuous."

"And what were her sapient counsels on so delicate an occasion?"

"To hazard every thing in order to secure a proposal. She told me, that with any other man, nothing was so politically important as the observation of the strictest delicacy; that, with

any *other*, my first object should be to maintain the semblance of indifference. But that the Duke had been so long accustomed to the officious importunities of interested women, and had habituated himself to the exaction of such unceasing incense and homage, that he would consider me cold, and stern, and heartless, if I persevered in affecting unconsciousness of his regard."

"Wretched sophistry!—as if the delicate prompting of a womanly nature was not the best guide on such occasions."

"She bade me beware of listening, Nelly, to *your* flighty arguments, and lofty opinions. I am persuaded that she is rather afraid of your downright frankness on many occasions; and I own that, for a time, she inspired me with a similar alarm."

"But the Duke—"

"At her instigation, I no longer laboured to conceal my preference. He was, alas! I fear only too fully aware of my affection; and, at

first, it appeared to redouble his own predilection in my favour. When I left Calmersfield, we were all but declared lovers. Every hour, every minute, I expected a formal proposal to Mamma; nor, had he been a beggar, and I an Empress, could I have awaited his measures with a fonder degree of disinterested tenderness."

Eleanor rose, and hastily traversed the room;—she could scarcely repress her feelings of indignation. "And the change?—have you no clue to its origin?"

"Alas! I might fairly answer, 'none!' for my own vague suspicions have been my only guide. But you are as well aware as myself that we have many enemies, and very few friends who would have looked upon my elevation with a favourable eye. It appears that Mamma's character as a manœuvrer is generally recognized in society;—the whole business was looked upon as a speculation;—even *you*, Nelly, were sceptical touching the possible existence

of my affection for Lisborough;—Lady Grayfield, Lord Robert, and all their shuffling clan, were busy in their reports of our poverty, and ambition, and baseness of spirit; and the Duke having once learned to regard himself as a dupe, began to think with disgust of me, and of the whole affair. That horrible ball at Lisborough House!—shall I ever—ever forget it?"

" Yet how well you succeeded in deceiving me and all the world! On my honour, Claudia—on my honest word, I believed the Duke of Lisborough to be utterly indifferent to your feelings—saving as the proprietor of Calmersfield, and as the best match in England."

Miss Willingham pressed her hands despairingly upon her bosom. "A woman's pride is an urgent preceptor!—but look, Nelly—ever since the painful moment that served to undeceive me—even thus have I been affected." She drew her white handkerchief across her lips, and held it towards her sister stained and moistened with blood.—Eleanor started.

“What it has cost me to disguise and subdue my feelings, I trust you may never know; for it is a lesson that experience alone could teach. I have never slept, Eleanor;—I have rested neither by day nor by night;—and all this agony has been endured with a smiling countenance, mocking and redoubling my anguish.”

“Ungrateful idiot that he is!” said her sister, vehemently. “May he atone for the sorrow he has caused you upon a pillow of thorns!”

“Hush! hush! hush!—will you never learn to appreciate the nature of my feelings towards him?—I am not mortified, Nelly—I am *not* disappointed;—his coronet and his fortune I resign without one movement of regret;—I am only most unhappy—most miserable——” she paused—oppressed by her emotions, and again Eleanor kindly took her hand.

“While I had any reason to believe that the change in Lisborough’s conduct arose from wanton caprice—from the mere cruel inconstancy of human nature—my pride armed my

courage to meet the blow. I did not sink *then*, dear Nelly. You cannot upbraid me with having shrunk beneath Mamma's unkind revilings, or the thousand impertinences which I saw on the point of being levelled against us. But the news of to-day I cannot nerve myself to bear so easily!—To think of *him* as a victim equally miserable with myself—to see *him* condemned to sacrifice *his* feelings to the painful exigencies of worldly wants——”

Eleanor interrupted her with indignant impatience. “ And can you really be the dupe of such trifling and manifest misrepresentation ? ” said she. “ The Duke of Lisborough is confessed to be one of the most opulent subjects in Europe. His affairs are involved—his rent-roll diminished—the immediate claims upon his resources are perplexingly urgent;—grant it—grant it all;—although we know it but from the gossiping reports of one of those upstart Westlands—a man living absolutely without the pale of good society.”

"And therefore the more to be trusted," interposed Claudia, gently. "A mere man of business knows the peril of trifling with peoples' pecuniary reputations. I should not believe Sir Robert Westland's report of a fashionable marriage;—I do of a fashionable mortgage—it is his vocation."

"That point I have already conceded. But even supposing the Duke to be embarrassed to a most degrading and improbable degree, think you that had he been attached to you with a true, and honest, and fervent affection, he would not have found ample means to gratify his wishes?—He knows that *his* poverty is wealth to us—that we are not princesses of the empire, to be wooed with principalities and argosies. If it be his destiny to live in expatriation, *you* might as easily have accompanied him in his exile as Lady Anastasia Burgoyne;—nay! he was well aware that you would have even *preferred* a residence on the Continent to Calmersfield and all its glories."

“With *him* I could have been happy anywhere.”

“Then never again tell me that he loved you,” cried Eleanor, with generous indignation. “Had he nourished one grain of pure attachment, he would have been aware of your’s; and seeing it, he would have braved all risks and difficulties to make you his wife. Do not let his pecuniary embarrassments be a cloak to the naked truth;—a man with his revenues is beyond the personal reach of their pressure. No! no! he never truly loved you.”

“Eleanor!—if *you* love *me*, you will not say that again,” faltered Claudia, in a low concentrated voice, while her cheeks became blanched to a death-like pallour, and her trembling lips were again suffused with their former unsightly tinge.

“Compose yourself, dear sister!” said Eleanor, soothingly, as she wiped away the sanguine drops.

“I cannot—if you persist in saying that he

did not love me!—I can bear to believe that circumstances compelled him to resign my affection, but not that he wilfully deceived me!”

“ Ah! what will my mother have to answer for,” exclaimed Eleanor, wringing her hands, “ in having permitted, in having urged you to cherish this hopeless, this unavailing attachment? *She* knew the peril of your position;—she saw that the happiness of your whole future life was hazarded on the die; and yet, for her own ambition’s sake, she urged you to dare the danger. My mother would have seen her children pass through fire to Moloch, had she but been secure of profiting by the sacrifice.”

“ He will be miserable with Lady Anastasia,” said Claudia, musingly, and without sharing in her sister’s outbreak of angry feeling. “ The Burgoynes are totally wanting in the refinement to which he has accustomed himself till it has become essential to his happiness. She will shock all his prejudices—disappoint all

his selfish exactions ;—and when he finds that he has married a mere tool of Lady Grayfield's —he who has such a terror of being duped— he will become disgusted, and endure at least as much vexation and regret as he must secretly know that he has allotted as my own future destiny !”

“ May your augury be fulfilled — and you will be nobly avenged !”

“ I shall never make you feel and think as *I* do, Nelly !—While he is happy, I shall bear my lot with patience ; but let me know him to be repining and wretched, and my courage will fail me. Alas ! I hardly yet know all I may have to suffer.”

“ Claudia !” said her sister, gravely, “ you have better feelings in your heart than I have hitherto found in mine. You deserved not that this blow should fall [upon you ;—*I*, who have profited so much more deeply by Lady Maria's lessons—I, who have so callous and so worldly a heart, might have borne it better. You saw

how it resisted Frederick Lorimer's disinterested affection, and its own warm impulses ; and you shall see it do yet more wondrous things. I love nothing but you, sister !—and I *will* love nothing else ;—trust to me, dearest Claudia, to devote all my time and thoughts to your comfort and consolation ;—trust to my unceasing efforts to watch over your failing health, and to drive the remembrance of this worthless man from your bosom.” She threw her arms around the sufferer, and embraced her tenderly as she spoke.

“ And my mother !—Oh ! Eleanor, think of all the unkindness—all the taunts—all the mortifications I shall have to endure from Mamma !”

“ Not long, Claudia !—you will not have to bear them long. I have the prospect of a permanent, and if not a *happy*, at least a respectable home, by marrying Sir William Wyndham.”

“ But you are not in earnest ; you cannot intend to sacrifice yourself to that vulgar boor —to a man you so utterly despise !”

“Enough!—the measure is resolved upon; and his chance is the more favourable, that I am sadly out of conceit just now with delicacy and refinement. Before this hour to-morrow, I shall have accepted the veriest bore in England; and remember, dearest Claudia, that I have bespoken your society and companionship in mitigation of the desolate splendours of my gilded cage. Be well—be happy—my dear, dear sister—and I will bear my own destiny without a murmur.”

Again the half-exhausted Claudia would have remonstrated; but Eleanor, who saw all the dangers of her perturbation, peremptorily obliged her to lie down, and compose herself to rest. Then, drawing a chair to her couch, she watched by her bedside until the miserable girl had sobbed herself into a heavy and unnatural sleep.

CHAPTER V.

Rien de plus triste que la mort, et tout ce qui tient à son cortége ; c'est une image que peu de gens ont la force de supporter, par la raison que c'est un malheur auquel personne n'a l'espoir de se soustraire. Il n'en est pas moins vrai que le ridicule peut l'atteindre ; il y trouve une source de comique que le bon gout ne reprove pas toujours. *Jouy.*

"It is better," saith the divine precept, "to go into the house of mourning than into the house of feasting." The customs and abuses of modern times have rendered this admonition somewhat difficult of comprehension ! The house of *sorrow* may retain its ancient value as a moral corrective ; but the house of mourning—the house of *inheritance*—is often degraded into an arena for the vilest passions, and the basest

impulses, which dishonour the human images of an immortal Creator.—Such was the mansion of Lord Stapylford !

His Lordship had breathed his last with a becoming *cordon sanitaire* of medical advisers round his bed ; he had been consigned to the shroud with a degree of professional pomp becoming his rank ;—the presidents of two colleges had shed the light of their grim and solemn countenances upon the scene ;—the apothecary was an apothecary of ton ;—the copper was a fashionable copper. His Lordship had departed this life in all the odour of professional sanctity.

But if *two* among the learned faculties had contributed their aid and consolation to Lord Stapylford's departure, the mighty comforts of the *third* had been wholly wanting ! His pulse had been periodically and anxiously felt—his will legally signed—but no one had thought for a moment of whispering in his ear that one redeeming word of hope, which forms an an-

chor of sustainment to the fleeting soul ;—no one had dreamed of inquiring into his inward faith—or of suggesting the becoming frame of mind for a departing Christian.—He had died, and *made no sign !*

The two Presidents had immediately inquired for their carriages,

With signs of sorrow,
Despairing of their fee to-morrow !

The apothecary had departed unto his pharmacy, to add up the sum total of his late Lordship's bill, in readiness for the summons of the executors. The family lawyer had ensconced himself, with his tin cases, in a hackney coach ; in order that his clerks might instantly neb their pens for a duplicate of the last will and testament, to be submitted for counsels' opinion ; and the sick-nurses, having turned a key upon the chamber of death, were seated in an adjoining apartment, “enjoying a comfortable drop of tea,” and jocosely calculating the probable amount of their perquisites. In the ser-

vants' hall affairs were yet more merrily arranged ; and while the butler was favouring the housekeeper, in the steward's room, with a bottle of his choicest Chambertin, to drink the health of the new Lord, John was explaining to Thomas, over a modicum of humble port, that " thank God their troubles were over, and that they should receive their long arrears of board wages from the executors."—Twelve hours more, and the merry-men of the undertaker were installed, under authority, throughout the house ; again twelve hours, and certain chambers were muffled with black hangings, and lugubriously enlightened by funeral tapers, while all the lower regions were converted into a temple of riot and intemperance.

And where were the widow's tears which should have embalmed the memory of the dead ? —where was the filial piety that should have hallowed those shrouded relics from the touch of vulgar profanation ?—Margaret, the Lady Dowager Stapylford, the ex-patroness, the

withered *élégante*, the former queen of fashion—had rushed instantly, upon the formal announcement of her lord's decease, into a travelling chariot, which was waiting at the door to convey her with her favourite maid, and lap-dog, and salvolatile, to her mother's dower-house, in Kent; there to remain in the decorous seclusion exacted by *bon ton* and etiquette, until after “the last mournful ceremony;” and Montagu—eighth Lord Stapylford—was giving audience, at Mivart’s Hotel, to the tailor who was selected for the composition of his mourning! Mr. Tichborne was stationed at his elbow, preparing him with the best instructions in what manner to evade the inquisition of “those cursed bores of executors,” and how to parry the cupidity of his widowed mother!

“Those fellows will be wanting you to sign releases, and sanction an increase of jointure; they will recommend that one of the trustees should reside on your Yorkshire estate, and

another on the Kentish property, in order to save them from rack and ruin during the remainder of your minority. Depend on it they will not hear of advancing a shilling towards rescuing you from your own embarrassments;—all the old servants they persuade you to pension off, they will take at half price into their own households; and all the timber they persuade you to cut down, they will purchase at half its value on their own speculation. All that sort of thing is part of a trustee's business.—I know them of old!—I saw how they managed poor Vallerhurst's affairs; fattening upon his undoing—drinking his wine—eating his venison—thinning his preserves; and all upon pretence of diminishing the Dowager-widow's responsibility, and doing their duty by the property."

"The deuce of it is that, what with my debts, and my detestation of business, I shall fall cursedly into their power. My mother's trustees were always bullying my father, and

getting injunctions against him in Chancery;—and, by the way, I suspect their vexatious interference was chiefly the cause of the ill-blood existing between my illustrious parents;—and now they will pounce upon me, and after inserting their talons into my property beyond my power of disentanglement, will suck the last vital drop that my father's extravagance and my own have left in its veins."

"His Lordship talks, Mr. Tichborne," said the familiar man of measures, whose chariot and blood-horses were waiting at the door, "as any young gentleman might, who was overpowered by the first pressure of finding a weighty concern upon his hands, without being properly aware of his own advantages and resources. For my own part, I shall be extremely happy to accommodate his Lordship with a thousand or two for his immediate emergencies, on reasonable interest—say twenty-five—or"—watching the expression of Tich-

borne's eye—"even twenty per cent.—to a good customer."

"By heavens!—Presswell, you are a prime fellow," exclaimed Tichborne, leaping from the sofa on this welcome announcement.

"And if I might presume to advise, his Lordship should by no means expose himself to a meeting of the executors—a formality which will probably take place immediately after the last melancholy ceremony—without being armed against their innovations by the assistance of legal advice of his own seeking. You will excuse me, gentlemen, for this presumption" (simpering, and rolling-up his morocco sample-book of shreds and patches), "but my transactions among persons of a certain rank, upon certain occasions of this melancholy nature, have given me a certain degree of experience——"

"Which you know how to turn to a *certain account*," interrupted Lord Stapylford. "Well, Presswell—and what do you advise?"

“ Oh! my Lord—far be it from me—an illiterate man—your Lordship’s tradesman—and totally unskilled in the intricacies of the law—to venture any thing like serious advice on such a momentous affair. But I presume to remind your Lordship, and Mr. Tichborne, that there is my cousin, Nicholas Screw, of Gray’s-Inn-lane, formerly of the firm of Twig and Screw, of Lincoln’s-Inn, a very rising young man, and regularly bred to the profession, who has more than once done business for gentlemen of your acquaintance. Lord Vallerhurst, as *you*, Mr. Tichborne, can particularly certify, never stirred in any matter of importance without Screw at his elbow; and I dare not say how many units my cousin was the means of diminishing from the balance-sheet in his Lordship’s favour, on an audit of the guardianship account.”

“ Nor how many he was the means of transferring into your rascally pocket, and his own,” thought Tichborne. But maugre this unfa-

vourable aside, he dismissed Presswell to his chariot with no darker discouragement than a promise that Lord Stapylford "would take his proposals into consideration."

Now consideration was a dose extremely nauseous to his Lordship's palate; and one which, like other patent medicines, he reserved for great emergencies. On the present occasion he was inclined to take as little of it as possible.

"All this is a horrible bore," said he, stretching himself at full length on the sofa, after the obsequious departure of his privy-counsellor of the needle.

"All what?" said Tichborne, who conceived that a Viscountcy with twenty thousand a-year could be no unwelcome inheritance at any time.

"Why, mourning—and guardians—and executors—and jointures—and a funeral—and all that sort of thing."

"Oh! the bore will be soon over—and then

in becoming your own master—you will taste the sweets of your position.”

“ My valet and all my fellows have been to Presswell, I find, to order their mourning. They want to go down to the funeral to see what Stapylford Park is made of; but I told my friend, Mons. Sosthenes, that we should all see enough and to spare of it before we died ; and that I should not be sorry if my *own* funeral were to prove the first introduction of my own *valéttaille* to my family seat.”

“ And about this rascal of a cousin of Presswell’s ?—for as to the money, I take it for granted you will accept his offer ! ”

“ Oh ! the rascal is as much a matter of course as the loan. A rascal is essential to a lazy fellow like me. *I* shall want him to help me to get at my own money ; and then *he* will want to help me to spend it. Besides, you know him already ; and you will settle it all between you without boring me. Now do, Tich.—there’s a good fellow—let fly a little note at the black-

guard ; and bid him come and teach me my lesson before I am called up to catechism. And now to supper—for I am devilishly hungry ;—and pray let us have some Johannisberg for the Seltzer water. They gave me Markbrunner last night ; and by Jove, I never slept a wink.”

“ You don’t take exercise.”

“ Who *can*—in town ? I often think I will go into the Life-guards, in order to be bumped and sworn into a passion in the riding-house. Fatigue is the best of opiates.”

“ Better come with me to Paris, and we will ride post together into Italy.”

“ I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Tich ! Next spring, after Melton, we’ll go abroad together —skim over France and Germany, winter in Greece ; and the following year I’ll come home, fight with my guardians, quarrel with my mother—marry little Minnie Willingham—settle at Stapylford—and ‘ live cleanly as a gentleman ought.’ ”

This declaration, which was made in presence

of the two waiters who were laying the cloth, caused a very significant smile to pass between them.

“I say, Bob,” quoth Perkins, the senior waiter, as they descended the stairs together—for he was a wag, and like other men in office expected his delegate to laugh at his jokes—“I take it very few of them gemmen as Mr. Tichborne brings here and consorts with, are in any thing of a condition to live cleanly and *like* gentlemen two years afterwards—eh? And don’t you go to give the prime Hock to that ’ere young chap up stairs; for it’s much if a young ’un such as he knows claret from Burgundy.”

But to return to the fair tacticians in Seymour-street.

It was an agitating moment for the whole household when the cabriolet of Sir William Wyndham—a vehicle which would have made the illustrious Adams expire on the spot, either with laughter or disgust—drove up to the door. Lady Maria Willingham, albeit in general a

very well-bred woman, and neither vociferous nor voluble in her communications with her servants, proceeded instantly to the head of the stairs, and strenuously and loudly assured her footman that she was at home—that the young ladies were at home—and that he might inform Sir William Wyndham *very* particular orders had been given for his admittance. Mademoiselle Céline, who, from the fact of Miss Eleanor's elaborate *coiffure* and *toilette*, had readily discerned that something was in the wind, was already eagerly peeping over the upper flight of stairs in order to catch a view of the lover;—at whose white corduroys and top-boots she presumed to make divers gestures of contempt; and Eleanor herself, who had settled with her mother that ample time should be given to Lady Maria and Sir William to settle the preliminaries previous to her own appearance, was quietly seated with Claudia in her dressing-room, abhorrently expressing her contempt of English country gentlemen in general,

and of this same Sir William of Wyndham Park in particular. “Little does he imagine at what a risk to his own happiness he makes me his wife!” was her concluding observation.

At length the fatal quarter of an hour had marked its last moment upon Claudia’s repeater;—a lapse of time pre-accorded by the family consultation, for Lady Maria to receive the blushing confessions of the Baronet, and furnish him in return with the maternal credentials which were to speed his wooing. Eleanor suggested that a liberal surplus of ten minutes should be allowed to their privy-council, in case the important contingencies of pin-money and jointure should be brought under debate. “Neither my mother nor lover possess a particle of delicacy,” she observed to her sister; “I have no doubt they have already embarked into the Chapter of Finance. Nay! I should not be surprised to find Lady Maria specifying the provision to be made for younger children!”

“I do not like to hear you talk thus of a

man you seriously intend to marry ; whom you will swear, in the sight of Heaven, to love and honour ! ”

“ And so I *shall* love and honour him. I have a mighty respect for fools, as forming the antipodes to my own knavery. As to Sir William, I shall do more than love—I shall positively *adore* him for furnishing a peaceful refuge to my sister and myself from an unhappy and discreditable home.”

In this placable disposition did Eleanor descend to the drawing-room ; and having paused a moment at the door, in order to ascertain by oral inquisition that no very imminent crisis was proceeding within, she quietly entered the room, extended her hand to Sir William Wyndham, and prepared herself to talk of the weather with an air of amiable unconsciousness. She perceived that her mother looked peevish and disconcerted ; and suspected that her lover had been saying either too much or too little concerning the pecuniary eligibilities of the match.

But Eleanor was rather excited than daunted by the prospect of a few difficulties to be smoothed over.—“With *me* he will be every thing that is liberal and conciliatory,” thought she ; “and when Mamma leaves the room, which I see she is preparing to do, I shall put on my royal and benign countenance of audience ; and the treaty will be satisfactorily, if not speedily adjusted.”

Lady Maria was, by no means, one of those commonplace English mothers, who talk of “having left their handkerchief in another room,” or of “having an important letter to answer by the post, which must form my excuse for leaving you so abruptly.” She knew that Sir William Wyndham, of Wyndham Park, had found his way to Seymour-street expressly to make a proposal to her daughter, and she wisely judged that the sooner it was made the better. Acquiescing, therefore, in the desire she attributed to the reserved country gentleman, and somewhat clumsy suitor, that at least a ceiling

and a floor should intervene between her own ears and his sentimental declaration, she left the drawing-room without peroration or apology; and proceeded to suspend poor Claudia's secret indulgences of tearful grief, by bestowing upon her all the tediousness of her parental hopes and fears for Eleanor's success, during the critical interval.

Eleanor Willingham, meanwhile, had seated herself on the sofa, and drawn forth—rather in compassion to her lover's embarrassment than to her own—the identical filmy web on which her needle had made so little progress during her Calmersfield visit, or since; but which served admirably to hang over with assiduous industry, in delicate emergencies, like the present instance. But notwithstanding her seeming pre-occupation, both eye and ear were sufficiently disengaged to apprise her that Sir William Wyndham had risen from his chair, and was advancing that useful piece of furniture angularly, from leg to leg, towards the sofa on

which she had installed herself; and that his own musical boots were in active pursuit of the wooden quadruped. In another moment she heard nothing but the coarse wheeze of his hard breathing beside her workbox. He had taken up a pair of scissors, and was beginning to clip off minute sections of an allumette which he had unconsciously withdrawn from the ink-stand.

Eleanor now peeped slyly over her embroidery, and observed that her future Lord looked as auspiciously sheepish as any victim destined to surrender its fleece at the Holkham spring meeting;—so mute, indeed, and so protracted were his deliberations, that she began to doubt whether she was not called upon to re-commence her attack upon the weather. At length, he hemmed his last hem, and began.

“If I were not fully aware from general report, Miss Eleanor, of the amiableness of your disposition, I should hardly have presumed to

wait upon you this morning with my present views and intentions."

Sir William paused—drew breath—took out a large yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, and honoured it with audible use, and elaborate re-folding; and while Eleanor plied her delicate needle with redoubled, and almost angry activity, replaced it in his pocket. This measure having necessitated a partial rise from his chair, formed an excuse for a tedious resettlement of position; and on the strength of his preambular eloquence, Sir William already presumed to re-seat himself three inches nearer towards the sofa.

"I conceive, Miss Eleanor, that your own discernment, as well as your Mamma's experienced hints, must have acquainted you that a man of my easy condition in life naturally looks towards a suitable marriage as the only measure necessary to complete his happiness; and that having so settled his views, he does not relinquish them on a slight discouragement. For my own part, I do not hesitate to confess that

my affections have long been engaged ; and that in my earnest trust to form a permanent alliance with the Willingham family, I gratify at once my pride, the wishes of my friends, and my own tenderest attachment.”

He made a tremendous abbreviation of the *allumette* at this euphonious close ; and Eleanor felt that the respect with which he enveloped his compliments, demanded the civility of a low bow in return. Gratified by the encouraging recognition, he bowed again. “Plague take the man !” thought the fair sempstress ; “this Noodle-and-Doodle-scene of compliments will endure till midnight ; and Mamma’s patience will never last out his prosing.”

“The first time I ever set eyes on Miss Eleanor Willingham,” resumed the Baronet, “I saw something in her countenance which encouraged me to form the most charming, the most exciting hopes of future happiness ; and I still presume to trust that I shall not find myself disappointed.”

Eleanor looked up from her work, and performed a sort of semi-serious, but very encouraging smile.

“ Of my family, Miss Willingham, I flatter myself I need say little or nothing to the daughter of a brother Baronet of my own county. The Wyndhams, of Wyndham Park, Ma’am, have represented that county in nine various Parliaments ; and when I add that our patent dates from the restoration of the Stuarts, I trust I infer all that is necessary, both for our own loyalty and the respectable antiquity of the title. It is well known, however, that a Wyndham commanded an archery brigade at Agincourt ; and that Sir Peter de Windhaume was lord of the buttery to Edward the First.

He paused—but *not* “ for a reply.” And the moderation of his wishes on this score was highly acceptable to Eleanor, who was now convulsed by suppressed laughter.

“ With respect to fortune, Miss Eleanor, I need not, I fancy, be more explicit. Long as

has been your residence on the Continent, your former familiarity with the environs of Heddington Court can scarcely have left you unacquainted with the extent and importance of the Wyndham property.—You remember Mannington Wood, Ma'am?"

Eleanor, in order to avoid a minute topographical sketch, bowed acquiescingly, although she knew about as much of it as of that of Birnam.

" Well, Miss Willingham—every acre of land, as the crow flies from Mannington Wood to Undercross Mill, was formerly included in Wyndham Chase: and even now, excepting the farms of Pear Tree Holme and Innertree, the former of which was taken into the Knatchbull family in the reign of William the Third, by a marriage between Sir Marmaduke Knatchbull and Bridget Wyndham, third daughter to the second Sir John—and the latter exchanged between Sir Claude Willingham and my grandfather, early in the late reign, by way of seal-

ing some electioneering compact—I believe I may say that there grows not a stick of timber on that ground, Ma'am, which is not lawfully my own;—always under respect to the statute of entail, and necessary impeachment of waste, included in the limitation of the original title deeds.”

Eleanor longed to tell him that in these

Nice quiddits of the law, “
Good faith she was no wiser than a daw;”

but, on second thoughts, she deferred his election to the honour of becoming her *butt*, until after the marriage ceremony.

“ Besides the Kentish property, Ma'am, I have a small, but compact estate in Wiltshire, called Camberley Lodge, at present let on lease to a very worthy family of the name of Smyth;—*very* respectable people, who spell their name in the respectable way, with a y—although I should have been better pleased if they had also a right to the final e, like the Irish

Smythes ; — *that*, you know, Miss Eleanor, would have stamped them at once of the aristocracy ; and it is always pleasant to have one's tenants properly appreciated and visited in the county. However, their lease will be out in nine years ; and any lady who honours me with her hand, shall then have the option of retaining Camberley. It has its advantages, Ma'am — it is not above thirteen miles from Bath."

All this was too much for Eleanor's gravity ; and she was forced to drop her thimble, in order that Sir William Wyndham's attention might be diverted from herself by a search after this golden implement of defence, which she had taken care should roll towards an opposite corner of the room.

" As to my Northumberland estates," resumed Sir William, gravely bowing as he presented the recovered thimble to its half-suffocated owner, " I must own, to my shame, that I have never yet visited them. I know, however, that they are entered into my rent-roll at

a valuation of seventeen hundred and twenty-three pounds and a fraction per annum; and that they are said, in the Reverend Mr. Dodderkin's history of the county, to have been presented by King Athelstan to one Gryce Windorm, or Windholme, in recompense of service done against the Picts."

"I am astonished," said Eleanor, "that your curiosity has never induced you to inspect so ancient a possession of your illustrious progenitors."

"I reserve the pleasure, Ma'am, as part of a bridal excursion which I sometimes indulge myself with the happiness of contemplating—an excursion, Miss Willingham, of which I cannot but believe that the proximity depends entirely on yourself."

Eleanor thought so too; and was only puzzled by the doubt thus thrown on the subject.

. "Sir Joseph Willingham, Miss Eleanor, is a very respectable man."

“ *We* have every reason to respect my uncle, Sir William ; and we consider him fortunate in your friendship.”

“ And Lady Willingham ;—her birth and education considered, Lady Willingham is an excellent woman. One can hardly believe her to have been a Bodham, and bred in the marshes.”

“ Lady Willingham has been quite a mother to my younger sister, said Eleanor ; “ and we esteem her accordingly.”

“ And Mr. Willingham is a young man of considerable promise. I look forward to the period when Charles Willingham will represent the County of Kent !”

“ We have not seen my cousin since he was grown up ; but we hear of him from every one as a person of great abilities and excellent qualities.”

There now remained but one member of the Heddeston Court family to place under discussion ; and Eleanor, who was well aware how

matters had formerly stood between Mary and Sir William Wyndham, felt rather nervous on perceiving that he had hunted himself into a *cul de sac*;—she was curious, however, to observe in what way a man so totally unskilled in diplomacy would burrow himself out of the scrape. But Sir William had no thoughts of any such nefarious modes of escape.

“ And Mary—Mary Willingham !”—said he, in a nervous plaintive tone.

Eleanor almost started.

“ She has a great regard for *you*, Miss Eleanor;—a very high opinion of your talents and judgment. It was from her representations that I first learned to estimate you as you deserve to be estimated.”

Eleanor was not Missish enough to quarrel with the mode, where the fact had proved so satisfactory to her feelings.

“ My cousin is very kind and very partial,” said she, graciously. “ Excepting my own sister, I have no friend on whom I more

thoroughly rely. I am willing to hope that in future life a considerable portion of our time may be passed together."

"Ah! Miss Eleanor!—if I could but hope that it would pass at Wyndham Park."

This was a stupendous advance; but still the proposition was scarcely sufficiently interrogative.

"Have I any chance of interesting you in my favour?"—said he, in an agitated stammer.

"Our acquaintance, Sir William, has been, at present, of such brief duration; and matrimony is so decisive—so very decisive a step!"

"Lord! Ma'am—my character is known in half an hour;—I am the most off-hand fellow in the universe—plain English, and no disguise;—what you see me once, you may see me for ever. Besides, I am pretty well known—something of a public character, and my light has never been hid under a bushel. My constituents—my neighbours—the members of the Wyndham hunt—and of half a dozen of the

best clubs in town—any of them will tell you what I am.”

“ Believe me, Sir William, I have hitherto heard nothing respecting you that has not been perfectly satisfactory.”

“ That is very handsomely said, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart,” said Sir William, somewhat affected, and with a varying complexion, which betrayed stronger emotions than Eleanor had hitherto given him credit for. He rose and went to the window, and came back after a minute’s absence, with twinkling eyes but firmer resolution.

“ Oh ! Miss Eleanor—take pity upon a very unhappy man ! What are the Kentish estates, or the Wiltshire and Northumberland property —what avails an old Baronetcy and a seat in Parliament, when one has nothing but a solitary home to resort to?—Oh ! Miss Eleanor ! intercede for me with your cousin—exert your kind influence in my favour ; for, by Jove ! the

day that Mary Willingham marries another man will seal my death-warrant."

Absolutely petrified with amazement, Eleanor was too much thrown off her guard to find one word in reply; and Sir William, totally engrossed by his own feelings, did not notice her discomfiture, but vehemently pursued his apostrophe.

" It is now fifteen years since I first knew Mary, Miss Eleanor. When you and your sister were still shut up in the nursery at Heddeston Court, I used to visit the Rectory with my late father; and there was Mary Willingham—a gentle, patient, generous girl, always ready to bear with my school-boy violence, and admit me to a share of her toys and pleasures. She grew up—and every body said she was not pretty, nor graceful, nor so accomplished, may be, as other young ladies; but Mary always seemed pretty to *me*;—her eyes were so meek, and her voice so gentle, and her thoughts so kind for every one else, and so

little for herself, that I have never ceased to love and worship her.—I do not mind speaking the truth, Miss Eleanor, even to another lady;—let me, therefore, confess to you that she has long known all this;—twice I have offered myself to her acceptance, and twice she has refused me.”

“ So I had already heard,” said Eleanor, faintly; observing that some sort of answer was necessary; while her own thoughts were wholly occupied in framing one to meet the eager curiosity of Lady Maria.

“ She says she has a great respect for me—a great regard;—but that she does not love me with the preference necessary to the happiness of a married life.”

“ That is so like one of Mary’s sententious formalities!” burst involuntary from the lips of Eleanor.

“ In short I can no longer hope that she will deign to listen to *me* on that subject.”

Eleanor was furious with indignation, at

the idea of her poor, spiritless, dowdy cousin Mary's *deigning* to listen to the very man she had *herself* determined to marry on the very slightest proposal.

“ But if *you*, Miss Eleanor—you whom she loves and honours—would kindly interest yourself in my favour; if you would only represent to her that I require no preference—that I demand no love at her hands but such as I may hereafter win by the devotion of my whole affection and whole existence to her happiness—perhaps, Madam, you might succeed in obtaining some slight concession—some distant prospect of a determination to think more kindly of my views.”

“ Sir William!” replied Miss Willingham, with as imposing an air as she could manage to assume, and rising from her seat in decided token of dismissal. “ You must be well aware that, at my age, I cannot undertake a task of so much family-importance, without consulting Mamma. I promise, in the mean time, to

think over all you have said ; and I need not assure you that you will find the whole family pre-disposed in your favour. Whether or not we shall ever become cousins, I will hardly venture to predict," continued Eleanor, graciously extending her hand by way of adieu ; " but I trust we shall always remain friends ; and that your visits to Seymour-street, thus once commenced, they will be frequently renewed."

She rang the bell for his cabriolet with the easy dignity of an ambassadress ; and poor Sir William, without at all comprehending his own position, or the alteration of Eleanor's manner towards him, found his creaking boots in the hall at least a quarter of an hour sooner than he had intended. Lady Maria, equally startled by this premature announcement of departure, hastened down into the drawing-room in dismay.

" Good heavens, Eleanor ! what has taken the man away so soon ? Surely you have not been so mad as to refuse him ?"

“ He gave me no opportunity for so magnanimous an instance of self-denial.”

“ Why, what has he been saying and doing for the last half hour ?”

“ Fulfilling the best purposes of his yea-nay existence—boring and prosing. You must be patient, Mamma ; ‘ a snail cannot be matched against Eclipse.’—It was too much to insist on a proposal on the very first visit; but trust to me that every thing shall be finally arranged to your satisfaction.”

Lady Maria was too much disappointed to bear even the *word* satisfaction with patience. She was, at the same time, too well aware of Eleanor’s determination of character to irritate her by further parley; and was forced to content herself with a sulky fit in her own dressing-room, enlivened by the interlude of a domestic tornado, vented upon the innocent Mademoiselle Céline.

With Claudia, meanwhile, Eleanor scarcely dared be more explicit, on the subject of Sir

William Wyndham's intentions, than with her mother. She had rashly promised her so much, that she could not immediately undertake the task of undeceiving her expectations. She suffered more, indeed, in the prospect of making her sister unhappy, than in that of making Lady Maria angry; and she was compelled to trust, like all imprudent people, to *time* for the re-adjustment of her difficulties. It was from Lady Robert Lorton that she chiefly expected assistance;—the person of all others on whom she least relied for counsel, and on whom she most sparingly bestowed her own confidence.

CHAPTER VI.

Deceive no more thyself and me,
Deceive not better hearts than mine ;
Ah ! should'st thou, whither wouldst thou flee
From agony and shame like thine ?—
And if there be a wrath divine,
A pang beyond this fleeting breath,
E'en now all future hope resign,
Such thoughts are guilt, such guilt is death.

Byron.

“ARE you going to the *déjeuné* at Wimbledon to-morrow ?” inquired Lady Barrington of Mrs. Grandison, as they met in the vestibule of Lady Robert Lorton’s boudoir, at the close of a sultry July morning.

“Of course!—what would be the use of remaining in town, with no other society than

the strawberry-women ; and with nothing but water-carts moving in the dusty streets ? ”

“ And Lady Robert ? ”

“ I have been employing all my eloquence in vain. She sets off for Spa on Thursday ; and says that it would disarrange her travelling apparatus to appear in full dress the last day. Do what you can to persuade her ; for without *her* presence, the whole thing will be a failure , ” cried Mrs. Grandison, flying down to the britschka which was waiting to convey her to Kensington Gardens and Lord Cosmo Somerset ; while Lady Barrington proceeded with her usual listless placidity towards the fairy cell, wherein Lady Robert Lorton, after her recent adieus, had already reinstated herself at full length upon a silken sofa, with a French novel in her hands. She entered unannounced, and quietly seated herself beside her friend.

“ I am quite overcome with despair , ” said Lucy with a languid smile. “ Grandison tells me you will have nothing to say to the *déjeuné*

to-morrow, dear love. Surely you cannot contemplate so base a desertion?—We shall all be there;—these silly boys have planned the fête solely in honour of our little coterie—Lord Cosmo for the sake of Bessy Grandison's bright eyes; Tichborne for mine; and little Stapylford in honour of your tiny Ladyship's attractions;—and it would really be an act of infamy to play truant, after making them expend a year's income on peaches and macédoines."

"I fear poor Tichborne's income would not feast a sparrow for half a day; and you really ought to blush, dearest Lucy, for encouraging him to do the impossible, in hopes of exciting attention on your part, such as you never intend to bestow!"

"How can you calculate the extent of my liberality?" said Lady Barrингhurst, justifying the admonitions of her friend by a vivid blush.
"Depend on it Tichborne will never ruin himself for *my* sake, either with or without reward.

My gentle coz is like the miseltoe, which miraculously retains an unchanging verdure, though springing out of a black and ruined branch. As the song runs, '*Il sait tout, il fait tout, il voit tout, il est partout!*'—and all the while *has* nothing!—I am persuaded that his own allowance does not find him in Eau de Cologne or his valet in shoe-strings; yet he has always ample funds at his command."

"Inasmuch as, like the miseltoe to which you so aptly compare him, he is a mere parasite plant; drawing his vital powers from the life of others. It is nothing less than odious to see Mr. Tichborne, and Lord Cosmo, and Henry Mulgrave, and the rest of the tribe, living as they do on this poor foolish Lord Stapylford ;—who is borrowing money at fifty per cent. and disgracing himself by all sorts of excesses, before his father is cold in his grave.

"And exactly *as* his father did before him. My dearest love, I should say that you were

growing a savage prude, did you not wield the cudgels so furiously in defence of your ‘*Narcissetto, Adoncino d’amor.*’”

“Not *mine*, believe me! It suits Tichborne and his gang to persuade their silly dupe that he is desperately in love with me; in order that he may project *déjeunés* and water-parties for their own amusement, and for the furtherance of their own *liaisons*.”

“Oh! fie!—you are quite censorious!—*Sur quelle herbe as tu marchée aujourd’hui?*”

“*Sur une pensée chère Lucie.*”

“*Et quelle est elle?*”

“That we have been all wandering on the brink of a precipice, and that *you* are still wandering on the brink of the abyss.”

“This horrible Spa journey of your’s has given you a fit of blue devils, or a fit of misanthropy!—or have you been weeping at the Lock Chapel, or mysticising with Mrs. Fry?”

“Neither, I assure you.”

“Or perhaps you are pining after the Lisbo-

rough strawberry-leaves?—I fear you cannot forgive the Duke's marriage."

"I cannot indeed!—for I like Lisborough too well to wish to see him made unhappy and contemptible for life;—nor can I be satisfied with his measures, so long as I have Claudia Willingham's wasting figure and tremulous voice constantly before me."

"My dear creature, you have too exalted a sensibility. Every girl grows thin at the close of the season. Living from April till July on sighs and syllabubs, hope and sponge biscuits, is a bad regimen to encourage *enbonpoint*; and young ladies who pass their time in improving their minds and morals by studying Madame Cottin—as you are doing now—and their beauty by waltzing five nights out of seven from midnight till daybreak—have very little chance of escaping the charge of a consumption, if it should please some flirting Duke to marry in the interim. The world says that Claudia Willingham is dying of vexation at the loss of

Calmersfield ; and that *you* are accompanying her to Spa, at once to escape Lord Robert's growls for the forfeiture of his heirship presumptive, and acquit your own conscience of any active share in the fair Claudia's decease."

" The world speaks as usual, with a forked adder's tongue.—I am going to Spa simply because I am weary of my mill-wheel at home, and because I want the stimulus of novelty and travel to keep me awake. You and I, Lucy, and other giddy-pated fools, who have ruined their palates by over excitement——"

" Now dearest !—let me pray you to remember that ‘ the dog-star rages ! ’ Do not encroach too far on my patience with your predictions, or I shall take pity on myself, and call the carriage."

By heavens ! you stir not !—
I must be heard—I must have leave to speak,

Exclaimed Lady Robert Lorton in a more

cheerful tone, as she threw away her book, and clasped her arms round her friend.

“Are you mad this morning?” said the amazed Lady Barringsurst, wholly unprepared for this vehement histrionic exertion.

“Most methodically so, dear Lucy.—I am going to leave you for two or three months—to leave you, love, surrounded by mischiefs and moral evils.”

“For my part, I can discern *no* method in your madness!—You leave me surrounded by my husband and children;—and if you are pleased to designate *them* as mischiefs and moral evils, I can only say that you are more frank than polite.”

“And by what *other* human beings, dear Lucy, are you encompassed?”

“You put me to a vast trouble of consideration!—what other *human* beings?—By my kinsfolk and acquaintance—my men-servants and my maid-servants.”

“You are trifling with me.”

“ It is the first time I ever saw *you* serious.”

“ I am discontented with myself, with you, and with many whom I tender less dearly.”

“ Madame de Stael says, in one of her beautiful explosions of eloquence, that a degree of solemnity attends every journey commencing with a sea-passage. From your air and gravity of speech this morning, I opine that Lord Robert has condemned you to invade the Netherlands by way of Ostend;—and that the prospect of twelve hours in a steam-packet has reduced you to this matter-of-fact condition of body and mind.”

“ We *do* sail for Ostend, for we have the Admiralty yacht; but believe me there is nothing in my projected excursion which does not promise me unmixed gratification. The Willinghams and the Villa Armagnanos are the pleasantest companions imaginable for such an expedition; and the set already assembled at Spa is excellent. But *you*, Lucy—you who are about to brave this dangerous crisis of the

season, in London or at Wilmount—it is *you* who make me uneasy at quitting England. At this time of the year people have flirted themselves into a most perilous degree of familiarity;—their mode of life has settled itself into habits of daily and hourly meeting, and their ‘where-about’ has become a matter of the most positive anticipation.”

“ So much the better!—it saves one an infinity of trouble and explanation to have those things properly understood. In May, I always find myself bored to death with ‘ Shall you be at Lady Jane’s to-morrow night?’—‘ at which door do you order your carriage?’—or ‘ at what o’clock do you generally ride?’—In July it is all an understood thing.”

“ And ‘ at what hour does Barringhurst go down to the House?’—when does *that arrangement* begin to be tacitly understood?” inquired Lady Robert very significantly.

“ Alas ! never !” replied Lucy rather abashed.
“ For Barringhurst’s movements, like your own

whimsicalities, are not to be calculated upon.—And so you are really afraid that we are all going to be too happy in this deserted town of London?—you fancy that, seeing a fine crop of grass springing in the streets, we shall emulate the dangerous Arcadian *naïvetés* of the ‘*Bella età di oro.*’”

“ I only fear you will find that the practice of the season makes perfect in more arts than an apt collision of persons and places. The world, after talking ‘ an infinite deal of nothing’ for three idle months, grows bold in the appropriation of names ;—and Scandal, intoxicated with endless potations, seizes on surrounding objects with the unsteady hand of inebriety, and defiles by many a random touch.”

“ My dear child ! you are positively as metaphorical as the Vicomte d’Arlincourt !”

“ Shall I speak plainly ?—Nay ! I both must and will ; for you already look too conscious not to increase my apprehensions. My dear

Lucy!—all London is talking of your intimacy with that scapegrace of a cousin of your's."

"With Tichborne?—of course!—He is on the happiest terms of friendship both with Barrингhurst and all my family; and as I am neither very old nor very ugly, the malicious majority of people in society are enabled to invent a scandal, whereby they trust the comfort of our mutual position may be destroyed."

"Of *your's*?—but not of his!—His position is secure in his own heartless egotism. Let whatever evil befal *you*, he will always find some other house to dine in, or opera-box to lounge in, or villa to raise his violets and strawberries; while *yourself*, if once wounded by——"

"You are really too ill-natured!" interrupted Lady Barrингhurst, with a heightened complexion, and with something more nearly approaching towards an angry feeling than she had ever experienced in her life.—"Why should you attribute feelings and follies to me, of which *you* hold *yourself* absolutely guiltless?

You know that I am very happy in my home;—that I love Barrингhurst and my children as much as I can be at the trouble of loving any human thing;—that I never voluntarily injured man or woman. And why should you suppose that for the sake of Tichborne—whom I like about as well as my bay mare, or my new harp, or my conservatory, or any other inanimate object which serves to increase my stock of amusements—why should you suppose that to swell the selfish vanity of a good-looking, ill-acting, mere man of pleasure, I would sacrifice my happiness, mortal and immortal—renounce my home and my children—and expose myself to the sneers of society, and the reprobation of heaven?—My dear Lady Robert! you should learn to judge more charitably of your friends, whether as regards their understanding or their principles!”

“ Now Lucy—*be just—be candid with me in your turn!*—Have I insinuated that you contemplate any such sacrifice?—Do you imagine

that *any* woman calmly contemplates her own destruction,—or that the incautious swimmer, about to venture beyond his depth, exclaims, ‘there runs the river which will destroy me!—and lo! I dare my destiny?’ No—no!—I do not even suppose that you are aware of regarding Mr. Tichborne with a dangerous preference; but you have accustomed yourself to his society and to his entire devotion;—his flatteries have become a necessary aliment; and were Lord Barringhurst to overhear and take umbrage at the whispers of society, and exact his exile from your house, I am satisfied that his absence would be a source of deep regret to your feelings, and perhaps of rebellion against your husband’s authority.”

“ Certainly!—I should feel that Barringhurst was acting like a fool, and consider it my duty to nip his absurdity in the bud. I most assuredly would *not* resign my cousin Tichborne’s friendship at his instigation. Were I *guilty*, I could make no humbler sacrifice.”

“ Were you guilty, he would not ask it;—he would drive you from his house. But *being* innocent, he has surely a right to require that you should disarm suspicion by foregoing a very intimate connection with a man of very indifferent character.”

“ You will make me fall in love with poor Tichborne in right earnest, out of a spirit of contradiction,” said Lady Barrингhurst, sportively. “ How I wish the world would trouble itself as little with my affairs as I interfere with those of others!”

“ My dearest Lucy!—I interfere no further than to place you on your guard. I am going away for some months, and with a persuasion that I leave you in the hands of those who are interested to work you evil. I give you my faithful word that malicious eyes are upon you, and eager to misinterpret your proceedings; but alas! it is not these which my affection for you induces me to dread.”

“ You seem to limit your apprehensions

to the wickedness of my raging lion of a cousin."

" Still less—for against *him* you are already guarded.—Every woman has an instinctive mistrust of her lover."

" Neither Sylla nor Charybdis?—Explain!—explain!—for you are beginning to excite my curiosity.—Where lies the sunken rock of my future perdition?"

" In Bessy Grandison's sophistry!—There exists not half the danger in the machinations of twenty libertines, than is concealed within the pernicious maxims of one dissolute woman."

Lady Barringhurst re-seated herself, and assumed a patient attitude, as if better inclined to listen to the remonstrances of her friend.

" I was myself formerly fascinated by Mrs. Grandison's wonderful powers of conversation;—I preferred her to almost all my intimate friends—even to you. There was a buoyant gaiety in her discourse—an originality in her

turns of expression, mingled with a carelessness or defiance of received opinions, which rendered her a most welcome resource against the monotonous routine of society. The excitement of her piquant vivacity soon became essential to my amusement;—I introduced her into my own circle, into your's—and for some time she was careful to retain, among us all, that decent reserve of manner by which she had originally tempered her gaiety, and won her way to my esteem. It was in Lisborough's favour that this was first forfeited. He—by nature the gravest and most listless of mortals—was intoxicated by the varying charm of her lively sallies—and Bessy, in her turn, exaggerated her own attractions by ‘gilding refined gold,’ and indulging in every possible indiscretion of speech. I saw all this—but I regarded it only as a breach of good breeding and good taste; for knowing that the Grandsons were *nouveaux riches*, and extremely ambitious of buying their road towards the fashion-

able world, I concluded her to be aware of the extent of Lisborough's estate in that ethereal territory—of the value of his single suffrage—and therefore anxious to insure it at any risk. I was persuaded that when once she had established herself as one of the presiding deities of Lisborough House, she would resume her former lively, but not unfeminine *naïveté* of address."

"You did not perceive that the assumption had been in the first instance;—that you had been the dupe."

"So little, that while all the world was inveighing against her undisguised familiarity with Lisborough, *I* was constantly encouraging the business, and bringing them together; in order that she might become surfeited with ducal dignities and subside once more into my friend Bessy Grandison. Soon, however, I discovered other instances of bad taste in her habits;—I saw that she was not naturally 'of us and of our company,'—that she was always restless in

our little reunions, languishing after greater displays, and seeking after fresh conquests. This destroyed the harmony of our *far niente* association, and by degrees my preference of her society was moderated into indifference."

"A change which herself and others did you the honour of attributing to a jealousy of her ascendancy over the Duke."

"She never *had* any real ascendancy over Lisborough. He was amused and attracted by her brilliancy of conversation, as he might have been by the efforts of any other charlatan; but he is, in truth, so innately and intensely aristocratic, that he always felt revolted by *parvenu* contact of any kind; yes!—even in the guise of a beautiful woman. But I own that her conduct respecting him *was* the first origin of my disgust;—such lengths as she went to secure his notice, and appear with him in public in his opera-box, or phaeton, or wherever the mighty foolhood of the world were gathered together! But this was not her worst offence, in my eyes."

“What more could she do—unless to interfere in some flirtation of your own ?”

“No ! she was pleased to move my indignation by a still more contemptible manœuvre. Like every other giddy married woman, Bessy overrated her own powers ; and ventured to put lance in rest against the attractions of younger and more innocent rivals ; and—”

“You do not mean to assert,” interrupted Lady Barrington, “that an unmarried girl—whatever her beauty—whatever her innocence—has any chance of victory in a struggle with an experienced matron, who does not scruple to put forth all her powers of fascination, legitimate or lawless ? ”

“Indeed I do !—In the first blush of such a connection, the married woman would doubtless obtain the preference. Such a Circe is mistress of arts which, for a certain time, assume an unlimited influence over her lover’s mind ;—but it does not last, Lucy !—you know that it does not !—The very first advantage obtained by her

younger and purer rival, is decisive ;—there is a repose—a holy quietude about the affections of an inexperienced girl, to which the man of pleasure flies for refreshment after the perils and exactions of a less hallowed attachment.”

Lady Barringsurst sighed.

“And this, Mrs. Grandison soon found to her cost. After opposing the Duke of Lisborough’s inclination for Claudia Willingham in every possible way, and thwarting them on all occasions, she no sooner decided that he had made up his mind to marry, and that Claudia was about to become mistress of Calmersfield, than she began paying her court in the most abject way to the whole family.”

“That, I suppose, is the Willingham version of the affair.”

“Far from it!—They were too much engrossed by their own plans and plots, to take the least notice of her’s. It was *I* alone who, blushing for her as my former friend, detected and despised her meanness.”

“Poor Bessy!—It would have been hard to give up her own particular duke at a moment’s warning, after paying for him so dearly.”

“Pray hear me out with patience!—In the midst of all her toadying and cringing—just when she was making love to the whole Willingham family, from Mrs. De Vesci’s parrot to the future Duchess, she caught a glimpse of Charlotte Grayfield’s counter-mine, in time to turn her apostacy to account. Lady Anastasia, she knew, would be a dupe far better fitted to her purposes than the daughter of an artful woman of the world, such as Lady Maria Willingham; so instantly deserting to the enemy, she persuaded Lisborough that all London was laughing at him for being caught by a decided match-hunter; and that the Willinghams had followed him to England with a casting-net in their hands, ready prepared to throw over the finest gudgeon of the river Thames!”

“But can you believe that she said and did all this?”

“Without the least shadow of a doubt! Lisborough never approached me at that period without some ill-natured history respecting my friends, nor without candidly giving up his authority; and you are well aware that he is not sufficiently imaginative to invent either the one or the other. However, I will even grant her absolution for her sins in that adventure. It served to develope her true character; and I have since learned to estimate the full extent of its duplicity.”

“You are alluding to her flirtation with Lord Cosmo?”

“I cannot think of it with patience!—Scarcely had she put the seal to her treachery towards the poor Willinghams, and turned the observation of her leisure upon our little coterie, than she perceived the good understanding existing between Lord Cosmo Somerset and little Barbara Desmond;—for Barbara is the most *naïve*, frank, infantine creature in the world, and did not even attempt to conceal her preference.

We all saw it ; and even Lady Desmond herself, who could not regard a younger brother as a brilliant match for her daughter, was moved by Lady Barbara's confiding and visible attachment to overlook his deficiencies.—I positively lose my patience when I think of it all ;—for in *my* opinion Bessy Grandison's malevolent and gratuitous interference in this instance was scarcely less flagrant than Satan's incursion upon the innocent happiness of Paradise.”

“ I was at Brighton when the affair commenced ; and having left Lord Cosmo in all the sublime and beautiful enthusiasm of a matrimonial attachment for Lady Barbara, I find him on my return a despairing lover at the feet of Mrs. Grandison.—But how is *she* accountable for his inconstancy ?”

“ By having courted him from his allegiance. Yes ! absolutely courted him !—A boy of his age was enchanted to find a woman of her fashion and beauty sighing at his feet ; and

without one compunctionous sigh, he left that fine generous-hearted noble-minded creature, Barbara, to break her heart or her neck, as circumstances might invite her."

" You have made out a strong—an iniquitous case against our friend ; and with the evidence so grievously against her, I can scarcely conceive how you have since been able to endure her society with patience."

" Believe me I have borne it most *im-*patiently, both for the Willinghams' sake—for little Desmond's, and for my own. But I have no more courage to irritate a truly mischievous woman, than to attack some rabid beast of prey. I could not overmaster her, and must necessarily become her victim. Even Lady Desmond, with all her maternal indignation rife in her heart, bears and forbears with Mrs. Grandison ; and I am fain to follow her example, in the certainty that were I to acknowledge my insight into her character, she would lay siege to Lord Robert, undermine all my happy-

ness, nor rest so long as one stone remained upon another of my peaceful home.”

“ You make me shudder!—And now tell me, for the love of goodness, why you suspect her of being *my* enemy; and in what manner my undoing could tend to her advantage?”

“ She has tact enough to have perceived that she has long been losing ground among us; yet is weak enough to estimate that ground at far more than its actual value. Lisborough has other objects to occupy his attention;—Lady Grayfield having gained her end, despises her tool; the Desmonds fly from her as from a basilisk—and even Wallace, and Wolryche, and Mulgrave, and Tichborne, while they adore her wit and beauty, and old Grandison’s dinners, cannot disguise from her their consciousness of her treachery.—Now although I believe her to have persuaded herself into a passion—a Grandison passion, be it understood—for Lord Cosmo, even he does not suffice to occupy her active mind, or to maintain her slippery footing in the world of fashion.”

“ Certainly not ;—a *female* buoy is necessary among the billows of the *beau monde*.”

“ No sooner therefore did she find herself sinking, than she clung to me.—And in what manner do you suppose she attempted to frame a cable for her new anchor ?”

“ I cannot guess.”

“ By branding me with her own infamy ! She tried to allure me within the boundaries of the quarantine ground, in order that, being infected, I might share her penance and her company ! She attempted to persuade me that Stapylford was dying for me ;—she had already deluded *him* into playing off the impertinent airs of a lover in my behalf ; and by constantly making him the hero of her conversation as an ‘ *aimable polisson*’—a ‘ *joli petit page*’—‘ *Che-
rubino*,’ or some other absurd appellation, she fancied she should end by interesting me in favour of a boy of nineteen, ‘ with all his *blushing* honours thick upon him.’ ”

“ He is certainly a very elegant young man——”

“ To captivate some elegant young lady, fresh from her sonatas and her French grammar. As to me, I am too idle to be at the trouble of loving any body but my husband ;—and as to pretty Pages, either in general or particular—I could see the whole race drowned in milk of roses without a pang. However, Bessy’s attempt served to put me on my guard ; and when I saw her playing a similar and a more dangerous game in *your* habitation, I learnt to detest *her*, and to tremble for you.”

“ Yet this is the very first warning you have hazarded !”

“ Lucy—Lucy ! even now—how ungraciously have you received my remonstrances.”

“ I was wrong to be so captious,” said Lady Barrингhurst, affectionately extending her hand towards her friend.

“ Besides, I felt re-assured by the excellence of your own heart and principles—by your affection for Barrингhurst and for your children.”

“ These might suffice to guard against guilt, but not against the imprudence which assumes its semblance.”

“ And therefore on the eve of my departure, I have ventured to open your eyes. One of the principal objects of my expedition to Spa has been to avoid all the jealousies attending the Lisborough marriage; but I have it still more at heart to break off my connexion with Mrs. Grandison, and without the scandal of a rupture. Beware, dear Lucy, how you place yourself too deeply in her power to become free again by a similar effort.”

Lady Barringhurst re-assumed her attitude of uneasy meditation.

“ Now own the truth!” continued Lady Robert, her cheeks flushed with friendly eagerness, “ has she not already done her utmost to urge your defiance of the opinion of the world?”

Lady Barringhurst smiled.

“ Has she not laboured on all occasions to

place you under the observation of the public in Tichborne's society? Has she not frequently left you to a tête-à-tête, in your drives, and rides, and walks, without any voluntary acquiescence on your part?"

"She has indeed!—you are perfectly familiar with her manœuvres, which I had hitherto believed accidental as my own actions."

"Experience of her plans towards myself has made me a mighty tactician in such affairs. One thing more;—has she not contrived that Tichborne should accompany you to-morrow to the breakfast?"

"I believe we were to have been a *partie quarrée* in her barouche. Tichborne and I, herself and Lord Cosmo."

"And Lord Barringsurst, no doubt, was to ride down, at her instigation, with Sir Comyne Wallace, or Wolryche;—so that you could not possibly have made your entrance to the fête upon his arm?"

"Precisely!—and how, even warned as I am,

can I evade this peril?—By your own account it is dangerous to provoke her malice. Dearest Lady Robert!—sacrifice your inclinations in my favour;—come down with me to Wimbledon; and as your horses have already left town, I shall have an excellent excuse for using my own carriage on your account.”

“I will oblige you with pleasure, even at the risk of appearing as capricious and fantastic as an ape in the eyes of the whole world—or at least of that minute fraction of it which is at present remaining in London.—But I must exact one condition in return.”

“Name it—and command my compliance.”

“That you do not make yourself conspicuous at the breakfast with Tichborne as your knight;—and that you do not invite him to stay with you at Wilmount during my absence from England.”

Lady Barringhurst paused for a moment.

“I scarcely dare engage myself by a promise in either instance; for with the best inclinations”—

“ My dear Lucy—you are well aware it is by the spirit rather than by the letter of the vow, that I wish to fetter your actions.”

“ Well then—trust to me in all honour; and at three o’clock to-morrow I will call for you to accompany me to Wimbledon. Satisfy yourself that I will henceforth avoid Tichborne’s *exclusive* society as much as circumstances will admit.”

CHAPTER VII.

But laissez aller !—Knights and dames I sing,
Such as the times may furnish. 'Tis a flight
Which seems at first to need no lofty wing,
Plum'd by Longinus or the Stagyrite :
The difficulty lies in colouring,
(Keeping the due proportions still in sight)
With nature, manners that are artificial,
And rendering *general*, that which is especial.

The difference is that in the days of old
Men made the manners—manners now make men ;
Primed like a flock, and fleeced too in their fold,
At least nine, and a ninth beside of ten.
Now this at all events must render cold
Your writers, who must either draw again
Days better drawn before, or else assume
The present with their common-place costume.

Byron.

THE following day was more than propitious.
No one could have believed, in observing the
filmy clouds which attempered the sunshine—

and the balmy air which shook the fragrance from the blossomed shrubs—that a *fête champêtre* was in agitation. As the Duca de Villa Armagnano observed, “*Le tems étoit à commandé ;—ni pluie, ni soleil—ni vent—ne ménageoit les ailes argentées du Bonheur !*”

Now the little billet in which Lady Barrington-hurst announced to her dangerous friend her change of plans for the morning, had arrived too late and too unexpectedly to be counter-plotted by Mrs. Grandison’s manœuvres; but the consequences of the altered plan were far from being so auspicious to the enjoyment of the parties concerned, as was the temperament of the atmosphere. Lord Cosmo, “for the sake of appearances,” was compelled to vacate his seat in the barouche, and drive down Mr. Tichborne in his cabriolet; and Mrs. Grandison, thus miserably defrauded of her due, and having moreover contrived to manœuvre her own husband into another party, had only to choose between the air of desertion occasioned by a

solitary drive, and the society of any accidental female bore, in need of a conveyance to Wimbledon.

She had serious thoughts of overlooking the coolness subsisting between herself and the Willinghams ; although they had overtly marked their sense of her evil-dealing towards them by omitting her from their list of invitations to General De Vesci's ball ; a *fête* which—thanks to their own fashionable currency, and the metallic currency of the Ex-Governor's rupees—had proved one of the most brilliant of the season. The tribe of Westland had been over-powered by the ranks of the Peerage, commanded by Lady Maria ; and the results of the splendid evening had procured to Eleanor (aided by her own skilful management) the *reputation* of having refused Sir William Wyndham, and to Claudia the *bona fide* honours of a proposal from the younger son of an Irish Earl ; an offer which, after having carefully ascertained that his elder brother was a young man of the rudest

habits of plebeian health, Lady Maria had thought proper to reject.

At the very moment, however, that Mrs. Grandison finally renounced her hope of coaxing the Willinghams back into good humour, one of Lady Maria's own choicest specimens of caligraphic humbuggery was placed in her hands; earnestly entreating her to procure an invitation to the breakfast for her youngest daughter, Minnie; who was passing a few days at home, previous to the departure of her family for the Continent. Being fully aware of Mrs. Grandison's influence with Lord Cosmo Somerset, one of the originators of the *fête*, she preferred applying to *her*, rather than provoking the comments of Lady Robert Lorton; who had resolutely declared her intention of absenting herself from the Wimbledon breakfast. Nothing could have been better timed than such an application; and all was immediately settled. Eleanor accepted a seat in the barouche; and little Minnie, sanctioned by Mrs.

Grandison's invitation, replaced her sister in the De Vesci's carriage.

It was the first time that the volatile Eleanor had felt really at her ease since she had so harshly terminated the hopes of Frederick Lorimer. Her conduct on that occasion had proved a signal of misfortune to the family; being followed by the announcement of the Duke of Lisborough's engagement to Lady Anastasia; and by her own mortifying misconception respecting the views entertained by Sir William Wyndham;—while her personal disappointments had been aggravated by the sight of Claudia's failing health, in disguise of which they had rashly pursued their accustomed round of dissipation. To cheat the fashionable world of its meed of mockery, they had danced with aching hearts at many a ball; and twined the garland of pleasure around brows throbbing with the consciousness of degradation. Eleanor's disappointment, indeed, had its bright side; she had escaped an eternal union with a

man whom she despised ; and she always assured herself that Sir William Wyndham's prosiness and his creaking boots, formed a consolatory *per contra* to his rent-roll and family diamonds. —But alas ! it was not thus with Claudia !

From the moment that the news of his Grace of Lisborough's engagement was first circulated by Lady Grayfield's officious zeal, nothing else had been talked of or thought of throughout the various circles of London. Every one had some common-place phrase to repeat on the subject; for it was considered a highly respectable topic of discourse. Many affected “ never to have thought the Duke a marrying man,” who had never thought twice about him in the course of their lives; and others had “ always predicted that his Grace's flirtation with Claudia Willingham would end in nothing”—who, till her name had been circulated upon the same breath of rumour that wafted the news of Lady Anastasia's promotion, had never chanced to hear it pronounced. It was in vain that Elea-

nor devised plans of amusement in order to distract her sister's attention from this all-engrossing alliance. At Almack's, some partner inexperienced in the gossip of the day, some "scarlet runner" of a cornet in the Life Guards, or raw dandy from Oxford, was sure to refresh the wound by a detail of the expected splendours of the Duchess of Lisborough; and whenever in the course of her dowager airings with Mrs. De Vesci or old Lady Monteagle, she entered a shop, the first object presented for approbation was sure to claim the sanction of Lady Anastasia Burgoyne's name;—every new bracelet, and new carriage invented in London, was said to have been selected by the Duke of Lisborough for his bride! Poor Claudia was destined to hear but of him and of his tenderness; and as, according to the severe canons of modern fashion, the loving couple themselves were carefully secluded by their friends from public view, the farce was admirably kept up on all sides.

To Claudia, however, that farce was of very tragical endurance ; and the more so from the constant effort to command her own feelings, by which she was partly enabled to deceive her mother. She was persuaded that nothing would afford so satisfactory a vent to Lady Maria's irritated feelings, as to have a reasonable excuse for recounting to all her own immediate set the sufferings of her daughter—the martyrdom to which she had been wantonly consigned by the Duke of Lisborough's unwarrantable fickleness ! But of this legitimate subject of complaint her Ladyship was defrauded by Claudia's singular fortitude, and Eleanor's presence of mind. Not even those who approached them most familiarly, had the least right to accuse them of having experienced one moment's disappointment. But Eleanor was not only growing weary of her tedious “part of excellent dissembling,” but extremely uneasy on account of her sister’s sleepless nights and failing appetite. She had little hope of alluring her mother to

Spa ; where the mineral springs had formerly proved of powerful efficacy in fortifying Claudia's delicate constitution ; until General De Vesci's opportune generosity had so unexpectedly enabled her to place in the hands of Lady Maria, the sum necessary to defray the expenses of the excursion. Instead of wasting the five hundred pound note on superfluous finery, it was appropriated to a continental tour ; and Eleanor soon found little difficulty in persuading the whimsical Lady Robert to associate herself with their party for the summer. Minnie was to remain in England under the care of the Heddeston family ; and although the plan was somewhat hastily arranged, it was perfect in all its branches, and had restored the whole party to good humour, through the all-powerful excitement of the “pleasures of hope.” The Willinghams did not think it necessary to inform Lady Robert that they were flying from the vexatious sight of the Duke of Lisborough's marriage ; nor did *she* feel herself compelled to

acquaint them that her own object in the journey was to break off her intimate connection with Mrs. Grandison and her gang. In the mean time all London regarded them as a very happy little knot of friends; rich enough, and idle enough to convey their summer *ennuis* as far as the Prussian frontier of the Netherlands.

But although both the Willinghams and Lady Robert were, or persuaded themselves that they were “aweary of the world”—(that world which is comprised within the three westerly parishes of the British metropolis)—they all secretly and severally, though unconfessedly, regretted that the date of the day fixed for their departure to Dover, would deprive them of the pleasure of assisting at the most brilliant and original fête of the season;—the breakfast to be given at Wimbledon in honour of the rival beauties of London. Lord Cosmo Somerset, Mr. Tichborne, and Sir George Wolryche, had persuaded Lord Stapylford to hire the beautiful villa of Ebury Hill, within six weeks of his

father's decease, in order to afford them a locale for this chivalrous undertaking; and it was shrewdly suspected that with Presswell's assistance, he had contributed at least his own and Tichborne's share of the funds which they all four affected to subscribe in defrayment of the expenses. Nothing indeed could exceed the clamour of expectation excited by the lavish preparations for the *fête*; and the four ladies who were suspected as the veiled goddesses of its worship, were pointed out by many an envious tongue in the persons of Ladies Robert Lorton, Barringhurst, and Desmond, and Mrs. Grandison. Sir George Wolryche, indeed, was known to adore nothing but himself, and was generally accused of insinuating himself into this gallant project for the pleasure of concocting the bill of fare, and assuming a temporary importance which insured him listeners and laughers for his threadbare jests during the remainder of the season.

Lady Robert, who was fully conscious that the

idle and inconsistent Lord Stapylford had been deluded by his intriguing companions into the affectation of a sentimental passion for herself, had at first been seized with a severe fit of prudish virtue, determining her to absent herself from Ebury;—but she was by no means sorry that Lady Barrингhurst's position afforded her an excuse for departing from her resolution; while Lady Maria, who, by way of courting her Ladyship, had expressed the most vehement readiness to leave town on the very day of the breakfast, found a highly diverting apology for her own infirmity of purpose, in a sudden accession of maternal sensibility towards Minnie. “She should not see her poor dear girl again for many months; and she was eager to show her a glimpse of the world, and afford her a little amusement previous to her departure. Lady Willingham thought a girl of fourteen too young to be introduced to such a scene; but then Lady Willingham was notoriously rigid on such points; and even chose to absent herself and

her daughter from the breakfast in compliment to old Lady Monteagle. Now Lady Maria could not see what right her old friend and neighbour had to interfere with Lord Stapylford's amusements ; if the young lord thought proper to entertain himself and the world too early in his mourning, his grandmother and her country neighbours had better close their eyes upon so boyish an offence. In short—*for Minnie's sake*—both she and her daughters had resolved to defer their journey for another day, and appear at the Ebury fête ! ”—People often think their logic irrefragable, because nobody cares to confute it. They terminate some uninteresting egotistical harangue with convincing self-applause, without perceiving that the bowing audience have bestowed nothing beyond the “*porches of their ears*” upon its subtleties. It is, in fact, an impertinence to intrude the arguments which influence our private affairs upon the patience of indifferent persons ; for the world is but slightly altered since the days of

the Vicar of Wakefield ; it troubles itself to say and think very little of our paradoxes.—But to return to Ebury !—

Much has been said by tourists and sung by poets, of the beauties of Tempe ;—much of Val-lombrosa—of Vaucluse—of the Rheingau. The skies of Italy, the seas of Greece, the summer sweetness of many a tropical climate, have been hymned by the sentimental of our land ; and if the writers and talkers of England are to be credited, our *own* earth and our *own* air are alone incapable of charming the senses, and forming a landscape worthy the celebration of the painter and the poet. To such unworthy slanderers I venture to throw down a gauntlet of provocation ; challenging them to show one earthly spot more beautiful than an English park, in all its vernal pride of woods and waters and verdure ; a retreat more exquisite than a first-rate English flower-garden ; or a crisis of atmospheric enjoyment more faultless than the “gray day” of an English summer.

The level lawns of Ebury, varied by the tufted thickets of surrounding slopes, and shelving towards a glassy lake, were glowing with an infinite variety of honied blossoms, and perfumed by the fragrance of unnumbered roses ; when the wind-instruments, whose musicians were concealed by the sweeping branches of the feathered lime-trees, breathed forth their first voluptuous symphony in honour of the arrival of Lady Barrington and Lady Robert Lorton. The fair guests were required to pass through the flowery labyrinth of an immense conservatory, at the further door of which their gallant hosts were stationed to pay the usual compliments of welcome ; and beyond, a group of village girls in the costumes of the different cantons of Switzerland, threw bouquets of flowers at the feet of the more favoured beauties as they passed. The first sound which greeted the ears of Lady Robert Lorton as she entered the trelliced conservatory, whose pendant blossoms were trained into a sort of flowery dome above, was the

giggle of the Lorimer girls ; who were attended, as usual, by a simultaneous troop of the most gregarious detachment of the Household brigade ; and who were venting their delight and amazement in fugues and canons of unmeaning vocatives. “ Charming !—delightful !—enchanting !—delicious !—superb !—exquisite ! ” The next was a murmuring whisper of reproach, breathed in the ears of her lovely companion by Mr. Tichborne. “ You promised us to be here early, Lucy—you promised me that I should accompany you ;—is this keeping your word ? ”—And although she very honourably turned away her head, at the risk of demolishing one of Herbant’s most imaginative hats among the branches of a Dhatura sheeted with silver blossoms, she could not but overhear that Lady Barringtonhurst’s vindication of herself rested upon an accusation beginning with the name of “ Lady Robert Lorton.” After this she was not surprised at the lowering brow which Mr. Tichborne presumed to turn upon herself !

From the remonstrances of her own admirer, meanwhile, she knew herself to be secure. Lord Stapylford not only had “never told his love,” but was far from having outlived the age of blushing at its presumption. He received her at the external door of the conservatory with a stammer of confused apologies for the earnestness with which he had ventured to press his invitation on her acceptance; and when she turned away to speak to Eleanor Willingham, whose arrival on Mrs. Grandison’s arm had immediately preceded her own, the boy-lover remained planted at his original post, with a look of the most respectful despair. He presumed not to force his attentions where they appeared so ill-appreciated.

It is scarcely possible to conceive how any person really acquainted with the frame of London society, can be guilty of the magnanimous self-sacrifice of attempting to contribute towards its entertainment. To purchase admission for a tribe of daughters to the future

festivities of the season, or to bribe the great world to admit within its sanctuary some splendid non-entity from Oriental India, or Oriental London, may offer an excuse for the amiable weakness of a determined giver of balls. But to attempt the acquirement of a reputation of this description—to toil for the fame of adding originality to hospitality—to seek the ruinous honours of having given “the best thing of the season”—is indeed labour lost, and money squandered! Although, for a previous fortnight, nothing perhaps has been talked of but the invitations bestowed, and asked for, and declined—although some vacant seat in Parliament has been less eagerly an object of ambition than a ticket for the coming ball or breakfast—although the most elaborate preparations have insured a graceful perfection of toilet on the part of the guests, and a promising prospectus of the pleasures of the day—or night—yet when the appointed moment really arrives, a general affectation of listlessness per-

vades the scene, and ingratitude is a-tiptoe to anticipate a general failure.

“I should not have come,” drawled Captain Macneill to Gertrude Lorimer, trusting to Providence that she was ignorant of all the manœuvres, and visits paid, and notes written, and lies invented, by which he had tardily secured an invitation, “only Stapylford bored me so on the subject. He is a very good little fellow, and one does not like to disappoint him; but at the close of the season, one is positively worn out by these dancing breakfasts.”

“Oh! as to that,” observed Sir George Meredyth, one of his brother officers, “I should have liked the thing well enough—as I told Wolryche last night at the Opera—only the distance is such a cursed venture to encounter, for the possible chance of a tolerable breakfast. As I rode through Piccadilly I bespoke a hackney-coach, in case of rain, to come down and fetch away my pony; and I shall make Stapylford let me have half his poodle’s camp-bed

for myself. Do you know, Miss Lorimer, that Gillow has fitted up Stapylford's kennel with mahogany stalls and hair matrasses."

"How very absurd you are!—I always quote *you*, Sir George, as the inventor of every improbable report current in London," replied Gertrude, enchanted by his fastidiousness; "I could wish, however, that among Gillow's contributions to the luxuries of Ebury, he had thought of providing a few benches or camp-stools; for in five minutes more I shall expire of fatigue. We have positively been wandering about among the American shrubberies this quarter of an hour."

"Oh! do not dream of so plebeian a luxury as repose, on such an occasion as this," observed Lord Atherley, another of the little military group. "We are to be torn to pieces between the attractions of a Tyrolian fair—a sham-fight on the lake—a ballet—a tragedy displayed in fireworks—and a high-life comedy represented by cascades and *jets d'eau*!"

“A sham fight on the lake!” murmured Emily Lorimer, putting up her glass to gaze upon a beautiful sheet of water, whose glassy surface offered a delicious reflection of the surrounding groves; “do they call that pond a lake?—Forbid it Leman and Como and Ullswater!”

“A lake—*à la mode de* George Robins. It is said that Stapylford *did* enter into a contract with Delcroix to fill it with lavender water; but Lord Cosmo and he could not agree whether it was to be ‘aux millefleurs’ or ‘ambree,’ and so the project fell to the ground; and they were obliged to content themselves with clearing it of all the commonplace carp and tench, and filling it, instead, with gold and silver fish, hired of Phillips for the day.”

“You are quite scandalous!” persisted Miss Lorimer with a laugh of applause, and again putting up her glass. “But after all, I see nothing of this wonderful fleet.”

“ The Spanish fleet you cannot see, for it is not in sight !” replied Sir George with a sneer, “ except unto such as are blest with microscopic eyes. Stapylford hired sixteen Dorking waggons to convey the materials for his Naumachia to Ebury ; for *my* part, I should have been happy to undertake its transportation with three wheelbarrows and a baker’s truck. Robinson Crusoe’s long boat would have proved a craft tremendous as that of Blackbeard the pirate, to such a fleet !”

“ And the Tyrolian fair ?”

“ Oh ! that little elegant device of gallantry is stationed at the further end of the park, among the ant-hills and mole-hills ; which Wolyryche thought assumed an air of the picturesque savouring of the landscapes of the Tyrol. There is one *very* large one, the residence of the consular-mole of the little republic, which he declares is a facsimile of the outline of the Brenner mountain.”

“ And the ballet ? is it to be one of the

insipid nothings to which we have been familiarized this season at the King's Theatre?"

"Oh! fie—can you imagine that we are to be presented with any thing less than original at Ebury?—I understand it is one of the tales from Lalla Rookh, dramatized and pirouettized by Coulon."

"Certainly!" added Captain Macneill. "The ballet is called 'Paradise and the Peri.' Little Pauline is to enact the wandering angel, and flies about tear-gathering, with one of Howell and James's chrysophrase *flacons* in her hand."

"Delightful!—enchanting!" exclaimed both the Lorimer girls; while the heroes of the cuirass, equally satisfied to have contributed to their mystification, regarded each other with a complacent smile, anticipative of the anti-Lorimer review of the case which was destined to enliven the morrow's mess-dinner.

Eleanor Willingham, meanwhile, had by no means bargained for the position in which she found herself, as *double* to Mrs. Grandison.

She had fully expected to join Lady Maria and her sisters immediately upon her arrival at Ebury; and although she had no definitive conquest in view—no eldest son or gouty Baronet to attract or retain in her chains, yet since the departure of Frederick Lorimer, and the defection of Sir William, she had degenerated into something of a general flirt;—repeated failures had rendered her desperate, and she was almost as well inclined to waltz with Captain Macneill, or Sir Comyne Wallace, or decide upon the auguries of “Love-destiny” with the blossom of an aster and Lord Atherley’s assistance, as either Gertrude or Emily, or any other thoughtless girl in London. Instead of these diversions, however, or diversions such as these, she found herself reluctantly compelled to accept Lord Cosmo Somerset’s vacant arm; which by many an unconscious and sympathetic pressure betrayed to her in what manner its fellow contributed to the support of Mrs. Grandison, who occupied the left flank.

Her ready tact convinced her that her presence was only sought and endured as a *blind* by the rest of the party; and as the trio wandered together among the embowered walks of the blossomy shrubbery, or stood romanticizing on the borders of the lake, she had some difficulty to avoid overhearing the whispers of her companions—which were of far too pointed a character to be calculated for the amusement or forbearance of a third person.

Grievously mortified—bored to extinction—and not a little irritated to find herself occupying so equivocal a situation, Eleanor Willingham had too vast a share of the crafty self-possession animating fashionable young ladies of the present day, to allow any expression of the real state of her feelings to expand upon her countenance. She was well aware that of all moods ill-humour is the least becoming to the features, and the least capable of exciting sympathy; and she was careful not to assume the fretful air of a conscious dupe. Nay! so prac-

tised was the fair Eleanor in the art of beguiling the time by looking *like* the time, that on the present occasion the smiles which accompanied her bow to every greeting friend, appeared as spontaneous as can well be imagined. She seemed to be both voluntarily and contentedly a party concerned, in the generally-recognized flirtation between the giddy Mrs. Grandison and Lord Cosmo Somerset !

“ What a grievous thing to see a pretty and talented young creature like that, so thoroughly familiarized to the corruptions of society ! ” observed Lord Grandville to Lady Rachel Verney, after an encounter with the mysterious trio among the shadowy glades of a “ cedarn covert.” “ You and I, my dear Lady Rachel, who have some fifteen years’ experience of the wicked ways of this wicked world, could not assume a look of more artless unconsciousness, than that with which Eleanor Willingham lends the sanction of her innocent presence to *la Grandison’s* evil-doings. I confess I have no

predilection myself for young ladies in the *mouton qui rêve* style; but then I boldly profess myself of the *roué* school, and am not a marrying man. Now Lady Maria, who is professedly on the matrimonial tack for her daughters, ought to see and know that she is irremediably blighting their prospects, by allowing them to see and be seen, among the connections of the vicious and—”

“ Hush ! hush !”—exclaimed Lady Rachel Verney. “ Alcibiades turned Timon ?—this will never do !—You, my dear Lord Grandville, who have not the smallest pretension to play Sir Oracle on points of morality, may fairly allow my friend Lady Maria to regulate her own and her daughters’ consciences according to her own good liking. Universal toleration is one of our national boasts.”

“ And pretty widely has it been extended, and pretty loudly vaunted by the latitudinarians of society !—Well ! Heaven mend us !—When I observe libertinism, like some obscene reptile

crawling over the leaves of our roses and lilies—when I see women—young and nominally innocent women—polluted by the filthy slime of its track—I grow ashamed of my calling, and could sometimes wish I had never ‘heard the chimes at midnight.’”

“How long have you affected this maudlin sensibility ?”

“Ever since I have observed the fairer and softer sex assuming the brazen front of impudence. I can laugh at sin, in Tichborne ; and overlook it in the piquante little Grandison ; but a lovely girl in parading the cloven foot, tempts me to visit the exhibition with all the castigation prescribed by Othello ;—not upon herself, but upon her parents. There will come a time—either through death or sorrow, when Lady Maria will mourn in sackcloth and ashes over the lessons of worldly wisdom she has bestowed upon her daughters !”

This colloquy, as well as the speaking sneer of many an observant eye, was of course inau-

dible to its unsuspecting object. Eleanor Willingham pursued her discontented way amid the varied pleasures of the fête, with a brow radiant with smiles; and many among her host of admirers, who would have been delighted to insure her as their companion, forbore to intrude upon a party apparently so well arranged, and so well pleased with each other.

Meanwhile there was one of the condemnatory host whose air of mistrustful displeasure was visible even to herself. It was a young man of striking if not elegant appearance, who was an utter stranger to her; although his distinguished air, as well as his evident intimacy with Lord Stapylford and many of the most refined loungers of Ebury, plainly declared him to be a member, however obscure, of the world of fashion. Without being at all handsome, this man of mystery was gifted with a glance of intellectual intelligence distinguishing him from the common herd of *ennuyés* and fine gentlemen by which he was surrounded; and although Eleanor could think

of no better definition whereby to paint him in her inquiries, than "a tall and very fair young man, extremely taciturn and solitary," she longed to describe him as "a very interesting looking personage who, for some reason which I cannot imagine, continually fixes an indignant and contemptuous observation upon all my movements."

Her curiosity, however, remained ungratified ;

Name and station none could tell !

and she was beginning to despair of acquainting herself with the real character of her provoking and unknown satirist, when she suddenly caught a glimpse of his figure in the distance, leading her sister Minnie towards the dancers. She was now more startled and perplexed than ever. Minnie, who was one of the prettiest little fairies in the world, and bright with an early flush of youth such as seldom survives the vigils and heartburnings of even a single season, had from her first entrance at Ebury excited far more

sensation in the fashionable crowd than had been anticipated by her mother and sisters—and seemed destined to revive the fairy triumphs of the Cenerentola. Lord Stapylford, too, who had been the playmate and friend of her childhood, welcomed her unexpected appearance among his guests with the warmest delight, seeming to forget his feigned or fancied attachment to Lady Robert Lorton in the girlish and unstudied graces of her juvenile rival;—and Eleanor having observed her mysterious censor to be the intimate friend of the young Lord of Ebury, naturally concluded that he was indebted for his acquaintance with Minnie to Stapylford's presentation. But when she saw her little trembling timid sister hang contentedly upon the stranger's arm, and smile up in his face with a glance of good understanding and affectionate regard, she avowed herself to be considerably puzzled! It was in vain, however, to question Lord Cosmo Somerset; his understanding was engrossed “full fathom five,” by

love and metaphysical casuistry with Mrs. Grandison. Having once pronounced that the great unknown was "some unmuzzled bear—some college-friend of Stapylford's"—he thought it extremely impertinent on Miss Willingham's part to intrude her curiosity on his further patience. "*Who* would bore himself with answering idle questions in the dog-days?"

Unfortunately the Platonic argumentations in which her two companions were engaged, rendered them not only captious under the investigations of her feminine curiosity, but extremely insensible to that common-place prompting of our physical nature vulgarly denominated hunger. They wandered on among the most unfrequented groves and sylvan thickets of the park; until they lost sight of the *fête*, and sound of the dinner or breakfast gong; so that when the company were finally seated at the different tables, whether in hall—saloon—tent—or marquee—that at which Lord Cosmo had been appointed to preside was found to be unhonoured by its

hospitable host ;—thereby exciting a thousand surmises and inuendoes as to the probable cause of his absence. A substitute, meantime, was loudly and universally called for; when some wicked wit, or particularly good-natured friend, opportunely suggested that Mr. Grandison should occupy the vacant chair of presidency. Poor little, stupid, pompous Mr. Grandison, indeed, desired no better than to become of temporary importance; and judiciously prefaced every proposal for a glass of Champagne, or a juxta-position of *poulets* and *patés*, with “In the absence of *my friend* Lord Cosmo, allow me to suggest !”

Weary, and hungry, and heartsick, and peevish—Eleanor at length persuaded her companions to draw towards the villa; where, on arriving, they had of course the pleasure to hear and see “The tables full !” Of course, too, it required but a trifling exertion of authority on Lord Cosmo’s part, to have a fresh one immediately spread for themselves in an adjoining

tent ; which became quickly thronged by those importunate idlers, who had been either too late or too disagreeable to secure a ready admittance among the earlier detachments. Eleanor had therefore the supreme satisfaction of eating her "*croquettes de lapereau*," and "*tourte pralinée*," among the *élite* of the bores. Their forlorn hope of a repast became literally a refuge for the destitute !

Nor was this the sole inconvenience resulting to her from Lord Cosmo Somerset's erratic courses, and Mrs. Grandison's truant disposition. It was not to be supposed that their tardy progress would influence that of the programme of the fête ; and the remainder of the guests having dined previous to their dilatory homeward march, naturally looked for some immediate entertainment to follow their own gastronomic feats. While Eleanor therefore was busy with her *glace panachée* and *pains de patience*, she had the satisfaction of seeing the whole party parade gaily before the entrance

of the tent; some towards the lake—some towards the Tyrolian fair; but all bent upon pleasurable indulgence and joyous festivity. Yet in spite of these continued sounds of mirth and diversion, Lord Cosmo and his fair friend continued to whisper over their maraschino, and break mottoed bonbons for each other's gratification, with as much exclusive self-engrossment as if they only had inhabited the marquee—or the universe; nothing caring for the weariness of their involuntary companion, or for the malicious interpretation of the wise men and “fools who came to scoff,” still lingering around their table.

Just as her patience was becoming exhausted, and she was meditating some biting sally of reproof, or bold sally from her imprisonment, a voice whispered in her ear, “Miss Willingham—will you give me leave to conduct you to your sister, who has met with a trifling accident?” and on turning hastily round, she found herself to have been actually addressed

by “the man of mystery.” Now to Eleanor’s heart the name of *sister* presented only the image of Claudia; who had grown up with her to womanhood, and was of course more immediately connected with her impulses of feeling than a girl of Minnie’s age. Starting therefore from her seat, she accepted the stranger’s proffered arm without further question or delay; and it was not until she had rushed several paces from the tent that she found breath to exclaim—“Surely nothing serious has occurred?—I left Claudia with my mother—surely—”

“I was wrong, perhaps, to startle you by the word *accident*,” replied her companion in a pacifying tone. “Minnie is not hurt—nor even much alarmed; but as I could not find Lady Maria, and as *your* retreat was immediately pointed out to me, I thought it more proper—more becoming—that *you* should lend her your assistance than—”

“Thank God! thank God!”—interrupted

Eleanor, with the deep inspiration of a person relieved from painful alarm. “I was apprehensive that my eldest sister had been seized with a sudden illness;—her health is extremely delicate—extremely precarious;” and as this involuntary avowal passed her lips, the tears burst from her oppressed heart.

Her mysterious companion seemed surprised and touched by her emotion, for he resumed his explanation with a softened voice and manner. “Again I ought to apologize for having unnecessarily alarmed you. I used the word ‘sister’ as the most instant mode of exciting your attention, and withdrawing you from your companions.”

“And my sister Minnie?” faltered Eleanor, painfully aware of a certain emphasis laid on the latter word.

“I could not succeed in dissuading her from accompanying Stapylford in one of those absurd nautilus pleasure-boats—which appear to have been prepared for no other purpose than the possible chance of drowning some of his

guests; when fortunately, just as Minnie was seated, and before they had left the shelving of the shore, Stapylford's Newfoundland dog, who is accustomed to accompany his master in his yacht, leapt into the boat, and it was upset in a moment."

Eleanor uttered a cry of consternation.

"Pray do not be alarmed—the accident had not one heroic symptom!—They were not out of their depth—not three feet from the shore; and although I was standing by, I had not a moment's opportunity to jump in, for the gratification of being termed 'Minnie's gallant preserver' during the remainder of my days;—with an extended arm I was enabled to seize her dress, and draw her to the turf."

"She must have been dreadfully frightened."

"By no means!—After laughing heartily at the adventure, she was alarmed at nothing but the prospect of Lady Maria's displeasure. Minnie is not old enough for the sentimental terrors of a heroine."

Eleanor, now re-assured on all sides, began to think the tall fair taciturn young gentleman extremely familiar and impertinent; and to doubt whether she had not been made the subject of a hoax.

“ Your sister was too much encumbered by her wet clothes to walk, and I therefore carried her in my arms to the lodge—where she was assisted by the assiduities of Stapylford and the porter’s wife;—we shall be there in five minutes.”

“ You are right in supposing that Mamma will be greatly displeased by her giddiness—by all this exposure among strangers,” said Eleanor haughtily, in the hope of checking her companion’s familiarity.

“ Among strangers?—pardon me!—but considering the extent of the throng assembled to-day at Ebury, I consider dear Minnie fortunate that her adventure occurred under no harsher inspection than that of her old playfellow—her plighted love!”

" I was not aware that Lord Stapylford had already claimed that distinction," said Eleanor in an angry voice, and quickening her steps towards the lodge.

" Minnie must have grown very reserved lately, if she has learned to designate him by any other name," said the provoking stranger, laughing at her air of indignation.

" And *you*, Sir!"—said Eleanor, irritated beyond her patience. " Have you an equal claim upon my sister's confidence?"

" Is it possible that you do not know me?" said the stranger, apparently amazed in his turn. " Is it possible that you do not remember your cousin Charles Willingham?"

CHAPTER VIII.

These things are but toys ; but since the mighty ones will have them, it is better they should be graced with elegancy than adorned with cost. Dancing to song is a thing of great state and pleasure ; and let the scenes abound with light, especially coloured and varied.

Francis Bacon.

BEFORE Eleanor reached the lodge, the misunderstanding had been mutually explained and laughed over ; and on their arrival they had the satisfaction of learning from Lord Stapylford, who had mounted guard over the door, that Minnie was lying down in an inner room, while her dress was undergoing the necessary process of drying under the hands of the porter's

wife ; and that a glass of mulled wine promised to secure her from all danger of a cold—the only danger she had, in fact, encountered.

Eleanor was glad that her meeting with the imprudent girl was secure from spectators ; it would have vexed her that her newly-found cousin should observe the want of sisterly feeling subsisting between them. Minnie had, in truth, found herself much more at her ease with her friend Lord Stapylford, and her cousin Charlie, than with the fair *élégante* who now stood beside her couch ; and her first exclamation was “ Eleanor ! pray do not tell Mamma ! —dear Eleanor !—pray do not scold me ! ”—entreaties which, to her surprise, were promptly pacified by a promise of secrecy.

A whole hour having been claimed by the officious female administrant provided by Lord Stapylford to complete her reparations of the accident, it was agreed that, to avoid inquiry, the young host should return to his guests ; that Minnie should be left to silence and repose,

after the excitement attending her accident; and that Charles Willingham, who would not hear of deserting his cousins, should share poor Eleanor's temporary retirement from the pleasures of the fête. Instead of the comedy and tragedy, aquatic and pyrotechnic—instead of the ballet, and ball, and Tyrolian fair, which had allured her curiosity to Ebury—she was now condemned to endure the wood-smoke of a very picturesque, and consequently narrow and inconvenient cottage-kitchen!—But Eleanor no longer bewailed her destiny, nor laboured under the impatience with which she had found herself restricted to the society of Lord Cosmo and Mrs. Grandison; for Mr. Willingham appeared an intelligent and very lively companion.—They had a thousand reminiscences to afford them topics of discourse;—and Lady Maria's approaching journey and Minnie's renewed domestication with her uncle's family, demanded a world of compliment on both sides. Long before the muslin frock and Leghorn bonnet

had resumed their original grace and sleekness, Charles Willingham seemed to regret that his friend Lorimer's experience had forewarned him against the hollow heartlessness of his pretty cousin; and Eleanor was almost sorry to be aware that the heir of Heddeston was two years younger than herself; and to perceive on the removal of his hat, that time which had so marvellously improved his address and brightened his intelligence, had done nothing towards the amendment of his sandy locks. But on the whole, the hour, which was nearly doubled by a well-timed slumber on Minnie's part, passed quickly and pleasantly away, in the estimation of all parties.

In the mean time Claudia, whose anticipations of pleasure at the Ebury fête had partaken of the languid listlessness characterizing all her recent feelings, had been destined to share far more profusely in its actual amusements than the lively Eleanor. Very soon after Lady Maria's arrival, Mr. Willingham had presented

himself, and had good-naturedly claimed the care of Minnie on her premature appearance in the fashionable world ; and her mother having gladly installed herself with Lady Lorimer and one or two rheumatic chaperons in the choicest snuggery of the villa, Claudia was enabled to accept Lady Robert Lorton's offered arm, and to visit all the varying scenes, and join in the successive amusements of the day ;—escorted by a little knot of fashionables of the highest order of *bon ton*. Lady Robert, it is true, was not in her most animated spirits ; but her society was, on that account, only the more welcome to the subdued Claudia Willingham.

“I came here under a promise from Lady Barringtonhurst,” she whispered to her young friend, as they stood contemplating the aerial tints overhanging a noisy *jet d'eau*, “that she would avoid and discourage Tichborne’s attendance. Yet we had not been five minutes in the shrubbery, before she disappeared ; and I have not the least doubt we shall meet them together.”

“It is generally understood that Mr. Tichborne’s share in the Ebury *déjeuné* was undertaken on *her* account; and we could scarcely expect him to endure a public defeat by appearing without his liege lady on his arm.”

“It was no less generally reported that our very green goose of a host—little Stapylford—projected the breakfast in compliment to myself; yet an air of frigid self-possession on my part has completely disconcerted him, and rescued me from his awkward attentions for the remainder of the day.”

“Lord Stapylford is but a neophyte in his art—an inexperienced boy; who is just as well pleased to be running races with my sister Minnie—or forwarding a badger-hunt with his grooms, as to be ruining himself at hazard with Lord Atherley, or sunning himself in the smiles of Lady Robert Lorton.”

“Very true!—Mere kitten-play like his is tolerably easy of discomfiture. But believe me, Claudia—and time will confirm the lesson—

every married woman who swerves from her duty, must have originally provoked the temptation. Her position in the world is so sacred—so commanding—one single word from her lips in reproof, or betrayal, or threat of betrayal of the first declaration with which a libertine presumes to insult her, must be so alarming to *him*, and so effective towards her own preservation—that the offence is never repeated, save with the concurrence of its object. We *hear* of seduction and of victims to the art of mankind ; but be assured that a *married* woman is a victim only to her own weakness or her own wickedness.”

“ Surely you are severe—surely whole years of devotion—of exclusive attachment—”

— “ Are indeed powerful temptations towards a surrender of affection in return. But remember that there is a first step to every thing ; and no man could acquire the self-resignation you describe, without very strong encouragement in the outset.”

“Men are so vain!—so apt to misinterpret a woman’s feelings.”

“Where a woman is hallowed and guarded round by the duties and decencies of a married life, the case is too decided to admit of a moment’s misinterpretation. In such an instance, *endurance* becomes encouragement; and the greatest and boldest *roué* never deceives himself, or persists, where the object of his pursuit is honest in her intentions of resistance.”

“Surely you think Lady Barringsurst’s principles—”

“Excellent!—and her intentions pure. But Lucy is an exception to almost every general rule, and her position is perilous indeed! She is so unobservant and unsuspicuous of evil—so much too indolent even to examine into its existence when others point it out to her notice, that the snake will have stung her to the very heart before she is aware that it has coiled around her. And then Lord Barringsurst is so engrossed by his political pursuits, and makes his

domestic happiness so much a matter of routine, that under Tichborne's artful schooling I fear she will some day learn to reproach herself with having lavished her gentle tenderness upon a stone. Were any other man to venture upon the familiarities, and comments, and remonstrances she hears from *his* lips, Lady Barringtonhurst would be startled into a sense of her own dignity ; and forbid him her house and her presence. But Tichborne is her first cousin ;—she has no brother, and consequently regards *him* as a friend and protector—who is, in fact, her most dangerous enemy. All my pleasure in leaving England is marred by my apprehensions for dear Lucy Barringtonhurst !”

“ Pleasure !” exclaimed poor Claudia, with a sigh. “ What mortal creature can indulge in the delusion of such an anticipation, unless it be some inexperienced child, like poor little Minnie ?”—Had she been candid, she would have added, “ or some favourite of fortune, such as Lady Anastasia Burgoyne ? ” but that was a

name which Claudia never ventured to pronounce!—and even its secret recurrence to her mind was apt to produce, as on the present occasion, a deep, deep sigh of bitterness!

“I have been standing with my repeater in my hand, Lady Robert, these five minutes past,” said Sir George Wolryche, now approaching them with Sir Comyne Wallace, Mr. Mulgrave, and Mr. Ducie, “repressing the eagerness of my companions, who want to attract you towards our miniature Tyrol—our Rhoëtian Alps. I assure you the effect of your attitude was so picturesque, as you stood philosophizing together beside the cascade, that I would have given worlds had Newton been present to immortalize the scene.”

“I conclude you would have entreated him to paint us as two peacocks, dipping their gaudy trains into some fountain, *à la Watteau*,” said Lady Robert Lorton, attempting to rally her spirits, and accepting his arm as she spoke.

“Or, like Flora Mac Ivor and Cathleen at the waterfall,” said Sir Comyne.

“There spoke the native Pict!—besides, Leslie has already transferred that bright imagining to canvas,” replied Lady Robert. “No!—no! if ever Miss Willingham and myself descend to bequeath our beauties to the Fine Arts—Claudia shall be pourtrayed as a wood-nymph about to encounter the dangers of the world—(of Ebury villas, for example)—and *I* as the Fairy Goodwill, applying the magic unguent to her eyes which disenchants all illusions.”

“Making the cold reality too real!”

quoted Sir Comyne. “You can scarcely call yourself Miss Willingham’s friend, unless you purpose leaving the picture a fancy piece.”

“On the contrary, it will merely serve to commemorate a fact,” replied Lady Robert, sportively, “and to make a frontispiece for an illuminated edition of Mrs. Chapone’s works.”

"Better reserve yourselves to embellish a landscape as pretty as that to which I am conducting you!" exclaimed Sir George Wolryche.

"Or if you are determined, like other blue-eyed goddesses, to play the Mentor," said Mr. Mulgrave, "take pity upon the delusions of poor Lady Radbourne;—on whom you may bestow your fairy ointment to the greatest advantage."

"I am not particularly interested in her reformation; she is a child of so very large a growth, that I am inclined to spare neither the rod, nor the cap and bells. But what foolery has her ladyship on hand just now?"

"Oh! she not only 'achieves folly'—but has folly 'thrust upon her,'" replied Mulgrave. "Our friend here, Sir George, and his co-mates of the Ebury fête, having driven the poor woman to utter distraction by their cruelty in withholding a card of invitation, the members of a certain club, which shall be anonymous, thought proper to promote a lucid interval by forging a

most absurd letter in the names of the Eburyans, assuring her, that Lady Radbourne alone was the object of their *déjeuner*; and that they had only consented to appease the envy and jealousy of Ladies Robert Lorton, Barrington, and Rachel Verney, by rendering her triumph as secret as it was undeniable."

"Which letter she had, of course, the tact to treat as it deserved,—with silent contempt," said Claudia Willingham, honestly indignant at the imposition.

"With silent contempt?" reiterated Mr. Mulgrave;—"Lady Radbourne knows not the cunning art of silence; and treats nothing with contempt but her husband and his humdrum relations.—Oh! no! she laid the flattering unctuous to her soul!—persuaded Radbourne to give her a new set of horses for the occasion; and is coming here in state with flying plumage—and colours."

"Extremely impertinent!" ejaculated Sir George.

“Nay!—surely she is rather ‘sinned against than sinning,’ in the present instance,” observed Lady Robert. “A woman with far more tact than Lady Radbourne might be imposed upon by so gross a breach of the laws of society.”

“Certainly; the impertinence *I* reprobate is wholly on the side of the inventors of this dainty project. But they will be disappointed; it shall never be said that any woman, whether in or out of fashion, was treated with insolence at Ebury. Sir Comyne!—pray give your arm to Lady Robert, while *I* hasten to despatch some person to be stationed at the gate, in order to secure Lady Radbourne’s admittance with her forged ticket.”

“Bravo! Sir George—bravo!” exclaimed both his female companions. “The times of chivalry are not altogether past; and we have one true knight yet remaining to defend our cause.”

“Is it possible you can be deceived by all this affected exuberance of zeal?” exclaimed Sir Comyne. “Wolryche knows as well as *I* do,

that Lady Radbourne has been parading the gardens these two hours past ; having been received at the gate with especial honours by myself and Stapylford."

" And by the way, dear Claudia," said Lady Robert, " we were ourselves surpassingly stupid to overlook so glaring a fact. Surely you remember, as we were standing by the platform to admire '*Les dames blanches*' of the quadrille of beauty, a stately figure in a *cerise*-coloured dress, crowned by one of those *ultra-merveilleux* hats—a sort of labyrinth of blonde and feathers and flowers—which poor Maradan says she is obliged to invent to appease the ravenous appetite for finery of the ladies of 'the monied interest.' That mass of gorgeous frippery must inevitably have been poor Lady Radbourne herself!"

" Do you know, Wolryche," observed Mr. Ducie, " that you stand accused of a secret inclination for this Colossal edition of the *Venus de Medicis* ; and that you—even you—are sus-

pected of having invented the club-hoax, by way of a screen to favour her admittance.”

“ To what purpose ? ” inquired Sir George. “ We had each a hundred tickets placed at our distribution ; and I had only to declare Lady Radbourne one of the goddesses of my choice to insure the insertion of her name on the list.”

“ You forget the general ballot,” whispered Sir Comyne.

“ Nay ! —you must acknowledge that you all four found me too accommodating with respect to your own selections, to affect fastidiousness touching a solitary instance of my bad taste.”

“ Which of you boasts the honour of having proposed poor Adelaide Verney ; — who was blackballed for being ‘ too ugly, and not sufficiently blue ? ’ ” inquired Claudia.

“ Oh ! we are upon honour—ours was a secret committee ; or all the ugly, and dowdy, and cross, and common-place, whom we have ‘ damned to everlasting fame ’ by our rejection, would enter singly into the lists against their

adversaries. But be assured, Miss Willingham, that dare we but produce our *catalogue raisonné* of the excluded, with the motives—the whys and wherefores—candidly annexed—it would form a document as worthy of immortalization as Domesday Book, or the Golden Bull."

A sudden exclamation of delight from Lady Robert Lorton suspended the course of their gossipping. They had reached the Tyrolian village; and a person even less susceptible of pleasurable emotions from trifling causes, might have been moved to similar expressions of wonder and gratification by the effect of the picturesque scene which now burst upon their view. On the steep bank of a brawling brook which traversed one of the thorny glades of Ebury Park, the wooden tenements of an Alpine village had been hastily constructed. A finger post pointed out the entrance to **Lortonsdorf**; bleaching-huts were scattered along the margin of the stream;—booths containing wooden toys

—belts embroidered with the feathers of the white peacock, and other trifles of Tyrolian manufacture, were erected before the balconied cottages ;—a group of male peasants were busy with their cross-bows, attempting to bring down the triumphal garland suspended to the top of a lofty firpole ;—while a knot of Tyrolian girls, represented by a tolerably well appointed detachment of the Opera chorus, advanced to welcome their fair visitants with the national *chor-lied* of “ *Wenn im morgen fröh aufstehe*”—and to place at the feet of Lady Robert a basket of the choicest flowers and fruits, and a beautiful collection of specimens of the different wares scattered among the booths of the fair.

Her Ladyship, meantime, with the brightened eye of gratified vanity, was not slow to perceive that, although the turfen paths of **Lortonsdorf** were already crowded with the fairest and noblest of her rivals, it was to herself alone that a similar homage had been tendered ; an homage which, connected with the dawning

passion of “our very green goose of a host, that silly boy Stapylford,” ought certainly to have been accepted as little less than a declaration. Yet so far from feeling inclined to mount the stilts of offended virtue which she had been prescribing—and with perfect good faith—in Lady Barringsurst’s case, Lady Robert was enchanted by so flattering a distinction. Nay ! she was even for a moment both surprised and vexed that her “*Narcisetto*” had bequeathed to other hands the care of conducting her to the spot, and gathering the first-fruits of her surprise. It would have astonished her still more, and vexed and disappointed her perhaps a little, had she known that from the moment of his darling Minnie’s unexpected appearance, Lord Stapylford had not bestowed a single thought upon the more mature enchantress for whom the fashion of the hour had tempted him to fancy himself into an unhappy passion !

But even to Claudia Willingham, whose

opinions were not exalted into enthusiasm by the suggestions of vanity, **Lortonsdorf**, illuminated by a declining summer sun, and presenting its national costume in striking contrast with the modish modern elegance of its host of lovely visitants, offered a scene as attractive as it was striking. At the distance of a few hundred yards from the village, the gushing brook flung itself from the ravine in which it was embedded, into the shadowy recesses of a coppice of Spanish chesnuts; while here and there, beneath the giant oaks standing in scattered dignity on the outskirts of the grove, herds of deer, which had been scared from their accustomed haunts by the idlers of the fête, stood huddled together in patient wonderment, or crouched in lazy groups among the furze and the harebelled herbage.

On arriving at **Lortonsdorf**, and catching a first glimpse of this enchanting landscape, all the lovely guests, without exception, had indulged in the usual vocatives in use on such

occasions. “ How exquisite!—how deliciously imagined!—what a fairy land!—what delicate invention!—How delighted Lady Robert Lorton must feel!—She must certainly have been in the secret!—How I envy her first *coup d’œil*!—For my part I could live here all my life!—How grievous that so pretty a village should be temporary!—I shall never—never be able to tear myself away from **Lortonsdorf.**” But scarcely were their raptures interrupted by the first stroke of the gong announcing that the *déjeuner* was served, when every single party was seen scudding towards the villa—yea! and without so much as casting one lingering look behind!

Lady Robert’s party meanwhile, who, like the man about to be broke on the wheel, “ *ne se pressoit pas, puisque le spectacle ne pouvait devancer son arrivée*”—deserted the spot leisurely, and with regret. Satisfied that the honours of a sufficient variety of *potages, patés, marinades, and salmis*, would be reserved for the founders of the feast, they allowed them-

selves time to bestow a regretful gaze upon the fanciful scene which was about to dissolve, “like the baseless fabric of a vision!”—Like Adam, they sorrowed at the gates of Paradise.

But as they approached the dinner-tents, and mingled with many a graceful group returning like themselves from the witcheries of the Tyrolian fair, they were not a little amused by the fragments of commentation which reached their ears. “After all, the factitious character of the thing bordered on the ridiculous!—*Poor Lortonsdorf!*—all floor-cloth—from Downing’s manufactory in the King’s Road!—And then the *corps de ballet* looked so hideous by daylight!—did you remark Mademoiselle Pauline—and Zephyrette, and Clara—and fat Miss Neville with the thick legs, who sings in all the choruses, and is called the *Omnibus*?—It was all so out of character—so inconsistent with the time and place!—Commend me to a milk-maid with carmine, and false hair and pearl powder!—And the Tyrolian churns with ‘Tomp-

kins, 12, Regent-street,' stamped upon them ! And the hay-forks—with ‘ by the King’s letters patent’ engraved on brass plates upon the handles !—How very ludicrous !—what a complete failure !”—“ That wooden village will cost Lord Stapylford a fall of timber !”—“ After all, the most wooden part of the whole affair must have been his own head !—Never mind ! he will carve a trap out of that to catch that silly little Lady Robert Lorton !”—“ At least his Lordship has the merit of being ‘ L’Amphytrion où l’on dine ;’ and thank heaven, here we are at the end of our journey, and at the end of our gewgaw-morning of starvation. Let us secure places, and attack the soup ;—we have reached the only tangible pleasure of the day.— Long live the hosts of Ebury !”

But even this gross and tangible pleasure proved evanescent. The process of mastication has its period ; and Champagne, however artfully iced, cannot be eternally prolonged in the act of deglutition. To smoking soup, and glow-

ing *purées*, succeeded the saccharine glories of many a *caramel* temple, enwreathed with pistachio laurels, and crowned with roses of melting marmalade; the Bastille frowned in spun sugar; and the Trocadero spread its battlements over billows of *crème à la Vanille*, and when these had vanished under the victorious attacks of many a fastidious spoon, *macédoines* and *glaces bombés aux millefleurs* took their turn for sneering condemnation.

“Gunter has not exerted himself to-day;—the *coup de maître* is wanting;—‘Immortal Robert’ has not found himself *en verve* this season.”

“Gunter!—do you think the Ebury conclave so *banal* as to employ a person we may all have by paying for?—They sent for four *confiseurs* from the Rue des Lombards, and a *decorateur* from the Rue Vivienne!—Lord Stapylford allowed his own *glacier* to officiate (*un glacier en i, bien entendu*, who arrived from Milan last autumn), and all the *apprets, diablos*,

tins, and *dragées* were forwarded by the Ambassador's bag."

"They say the despatches were *bien sucrés*! in consequence; and that two autographs dated from the *Bureau des affaires étrangères*, were quite a *brouillade* from being steeped in *sirop de cédrat*."

"Oh! I can discern a very diplomatic acidity in these very *pralines*!—Lady Rachel, have not these wafers a sort of Talleyrandical *goût*?"

"*Il me semble que vous cherchez de loin!*—I have very little doubt they borrow their odious flavour from the van of a Wimbledon carrier, and a truss of musty English hay."

"Grandville! prythee catch the eye or the sleeve of that gaping monster of a *maître d'hôtel*; and inquire whether our constitutions are to be endangered by peach-ice without a *chasse*?"

"If you want *liqueurs*, I beg to assure you that Captain Macneill and Meredyth have been

quaffing *Crème de marron*, in claret glasses, for the last quarter of an hour ; and judging from appearances, I should decide that it was full five degrees hotter than the soup.”

“Oh ! I have it from the best authority that all the *potages* were iced by mistake.”

“Nothing can be more probable,” said Lady Rachel, laughing, “for an attendant with ungloved and dirty hands favoured me just now with some Curaçoa jelly, dancing the *galopade* on a very hot plate.”

“The same unprincipled caitiff doubtless who offered me Parmesan with my *Julienne* ; and inflicted *sauce piquante* upon Atherley, with *poulet au vélouté* !”

“We must not be hypercritical,” said Lady Rachel, observing that Wolryche and Wallace were approaching. “*Ménage de célibataire*, like matrimony, is always taken for better and for worse.”

“Oh ! I am as little difficult as any fellow breathing ; but a ‘worse’ which includes a

dinner in July without the relief of Seltzer water, appears to me to *passer la permission*."

"Be pacified!—you had four tumblers of iced Hock."

"Iced Hock!—I mistook it for the pyroligneous acid invented by Beaufoy, which 'smells so wooringly' when we cross Vauxhall Bridge on a midsummer day."

This croaking colloquy was now interrupted by some delicious glees, breathed from orchestras of unseen musicians; and as common politeness necessitated a temporary silence among the audience, they ccnsoled themselves by a still severer burst of discontent on the close of the strain.

"Music!—*nothing* but music!—stunned with French horns on the water—deafened by the brass band of the Life Guards all dinner time—and now the indigenous screech-owls of the Lyceum, by way of dessert!—What an intolerable bore."

"And then those terrible old English glees!—

as common-place as a charity sermon—and worthy of nothing but Freemasons' Hall, or a Theatrical Fund dinner."

"Music may be the food of love—but 'tis a deuced meagre food for the hungry."

"Moving already?—Lady Rachel, allow me to assist you in the recovery of your gloves and handkerchief.—Yes! positively—they are crowding down to the lake at the imminent risk of dyspepsia;—I was really in hopes our locomotive labours were closed for the day."

In these hopes it appeared that Lady Robert Lorton shared not; for while the gentlemen still lingered over their claret, she persuaded Claudia Willingham to accompany her, once more, on a tour through the shrubberies in search of the truant Lady Barringsurst. "I should not be the least surprised," said she, "to find her dining *tete-à-tete* with Mr. Tichborne in one of those kiosks; or at the upper stage of the pagoda."

"Surely she would not hazard so bold a de-

fiance of etiquette for so trifling a gratification."

"The appearance of the thing would probably never occur to her until the mischief was done. A woman of Lucy's *pococurante* disposition, becomes indiscreet through thoughtlessness; and finding her character unjustly aspersed, finally becomes culpable through desperation."

"And as our Parisian proverb runs, '*se jette dans la rivière pour éviter l'orage.*'"

"Precisely! and I wish I knew *as* precisely what covert to beat for my snared partridge. I have met Mrs. Grandison repeatedly in the course of the morning, braving the censures of the world on Lord Cosmo's arm. However *she* has some excuse; for fool as she is in her self-exposure, her husband is the far greater ninny."

"It is really diverting to see poor little fussy, stuffy, simpering Mr. Grandison, trudging about with his wife's Cachemere on his arm; delighted the fine ladies should see that Bessy has a Lord for her lover, and is as bad as themselves."

“Oh! Bessy Grandison’s lover, for the time being, is always the object of her husband’s idolatry. Grandison is so proud when he can seize his arm in St. James’s-street, or cash his drafts, or exercise his horses, or laugh at his witticisms! In Lisborough’s reign, I remember he made himself running footman to the whole family; I used to send him down in the rain to King-street, whenever Willis forgot to forward my tickets; and as to Charlotte Grayfield, she made him subscribe to every charitable institution from Bayswater to Moor-fields, and procure a Pomeranian puppy for her from his correspondent at Riga.—You cannot imagine how he loved us all.”

“I suppose he will purchase a majority for Lord Cosmo, or pay off his balance at Crockford’s.”

“It will surprise me infinitely if Somerset does not become disgusted with Mrs. Grandison long before he gets credit enough with the little banker to settle even with his tailor. Barbara Desmond is looking lovely to-day, with her

violet eyes and raven tresses ; ‘*et l'on revient toujours à ses premiers amours*’ when the love is innocent and honourable, and its object beautiful.”

They were overtaken by the dew and the dusk while still pursuing their unsuccessful search through the musky thickets of the shrubbery ; and on being conducted towards the villa by the assiduity of their former chevaliers, they were startled by the illuminated *façade*, on which the legend of

HONNEUR AUX DAMES

appeared in golden lamps, encircled by a resplendent glory !—

On entering the ball-room, a still more exquisite *coup d'œil* burst upon their view. The walls, which were covered by a dazzling surface of spotless white scagliola, were decorated with garlands and trophies of natural roses of every variety of dye ;—the stalks being invisibly refreshed by tubes containing water, while beneath the lofty chandeliers, draperies of filmy

and waving muslin were interposed to modify the blaze of light. The musicians were concealed within bowers of blossoming orange trees; and attendants from time to time unostentatiously sprinkled the dancing floor with *arrosoirs* full of *Esprit de Bouquet à la glace*.

As they entered the scene of enchantment, the first living object which arrested the eye of Claudia, was the buoyant figure of her sister Minnie, with her *robe à l'enfant* and dishevelled tresses, flying through the waltz upon Lord Stapylford's arm; while a thousand exclamations of rapturous delight from the crowd around her, attested the matchless fascination of her youthful loveliness and animation.—“Have you seen the new beauty?”—“What do you think of the Venus in her teens?” formed the burden of general conversation. The string of gregarious Life-guardsmen were crowding forward according to their usual system, for a simultaneous regimental presentation; and Lord Ormany, the commander-in-chief of the *roués*, the

examining censor whose vote is indispensable to neophytes standing for their degree of beauty, had already pronounced that “little Willingham would far outshine Lady Barbara Desmond, Lady Barrington, Princess Sciarrha, or any other among the decided beauties of the day.” Claudia was amazed!—the triumphs of the Cenerentola were already beginning.

“Lady Maria Willingham’s train of lovely daughters seems as interminable as Banquo’s vision of crowned heads,” said tuft-hunting Captain Macneill, to a Dowager to whose dinners—prospective and retrospective—he was in the habit of devoting his pompous attentions. “And still the last is first.”

“Poor little girl!” exclaimed the irritated dowager-chaperon, with a glance towards her own two gaunt Pillars of Hercules, who were frowning unpartnered on the scene. “Poor little innocent!—how she must long to be in bed and asleep.—I conclude Lady Maria will present her in a bib and tucker at the next

drawing-room ; as she did not favour us with a sight of her elder flowers till they had run to seed, she seems resolved that her new rose should enchant us in the bud.—Very ill-judged indeed !”

“ Oh ! the Willinghams are going abroad to-morrow ; and this little fairy is to be guarded in some lay-cloister till their return.”

“ Umph !—her Ladyship condescends to dazzle us with a glance at the comet, in order that we may busy ourselves with computing the period of its re-appearance.—Umph !”

“ She must look about her in the interim for another Duke ; and bait the hook more cunningly than she did for his Grace of Lisborough.”

“ On the contrary, too much cunning ruined the cause. The fly was made so very, very tempting, that the eager dupe swallowed it too voraciously—and it stuck in his throat !—Ah ! my dear Miss Claudia ! how do you do ?—We have been admiring your charming little sister—

quite a miniature of yourself!—Lord Stapylford appears desperately smitten!”—(behind her hand) “ forty thousand a-year, you know, my dear; besides the savings of his minority. On second thoughts I scarcely recommend it—*écarté* and *post-obits* have made a mere skeleton of the property!—Lady Robert!—I am enchanted to get near you—I have not been able to exchange one word with you to-day.”

“Thank you, my dear Lady Peewit, for your kind intentions; but my own stock of words is nearly exhausted. I set off to Spa in the morning; and my trunks and my discourse are sealed up by the customs, until I have passed the frontier.”

“How is my friend Lord Robert?”

“Well.”

“And the dear children?”

“Well too.”

“And where is Lord Robert to-night?”

“At Dover!”

“At Dover—and why?”

“That my friends the Willinghams, and the Willinghams’ friend Sophia Lorton, may sleep at the York Hotel to-morrow night, without fear of the rheumatism. Come—come, dear Claudia ; —take care of me across the room ; for I see a vacant seat by Lady Maria, and I must make my final arrangements with her about our hour of starting.”

CHAPTER IX.

Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that
are written down old with all the characters of age?—Fie!
Fie! Fie!

Henry IV. Second Part.

IT has been shrewdly said, that were any human being enabled by some magic chance to contemplate its own person after an insensible interlapse of ten years, the change would appear incredibly awful;—and that we should, on such a revelation of our decadence, inevitably feel tempted to disown ourselves. The daily reflections of the looking-glass, indeed, are only varied by the gentle and imperceptible gradation of from night till morning—from morning

until another evening; and we grow old in happy unconsciousness of the swollen features, the deepening wrinkles, the deadening glances, and the wasting limbs. A beauty may sometimes ostentatiously exclaim, "Ah! I am sadly altered!" but she appeases her wounded vanity by a secret whisper of "at least I am not looking well *to-day*;" and is apt to transfer the blame to Dévy or to Girardot;—to an unbecoming hat, or an ill-fitting dress. Beaux too, have been heard to acknowledge—"By Jove! I am not the fellow I was!—I was weighed the other day at the Cocoa-tree, and I find I am growing quite a corpulent middle-aged man!"—But then comes the palliative. "The fact is, the weather has been so deuced bad, that the hounds have not been out thirty times this season; and want of exercise plays the very devil with the constitution!"

But however we may succeed in deceiving ourselves, we deceive not others by these dainty devices and equivocations. Our neighbours

and friends perceive the hobble in the gait, which *we* are wont to attribute to the incidental misery of a tight shoe ; and attribute the spectacles or *lorgnette* which *we* claim in honour of our near-sightedness, to the evolutions of the remorseless glass of time. The “*ci-devant jeune homme*”—the “*jeune dame qui a été jeune si longtemps,*”—are accurately dated in the envious kalendar of many a contemporary and impartial friend ; and while we affect to wonder at the unseemly apparition of our *first* gray hair, our kinsfolk and acquaintance agree in ~~a~~ secret persuasion that it has only escaped the chemical ensablement disguising all the rest of the *chevelure*.—Some, indeed, presume to suggest that “there is a time for all things ;” “that wigs are an admirable invention ;” and that “to this conclusion must we come at last !”

My readers are at this moment perhaps accusing my very self of the increasing garrulity of age ; and maliciously insinuating that I am

growing suspiciously prosy in this laboured digression. The truth is, that like a charlatan in the preparation of his tricks, I am attempting to divert their attention for a moment from the personages and subject of my story;—I wish them to turn away their heads a moment, that the fountain which disappeared at Elis may have time to rise in Sicily;—I am attempting to distract their notice by a flourish of idle trumpets, during the period intervening between “Wallenstein’s camp,” and ¶“Wallenstein’s death.” Although I am fully aware that the literary Syncope is an unpopular mode of composition, I have two powerful instances wherewith to back my apology—the last volume of the Old Mortality of Scott, and the exquisite Simple Story of Mrs. Inchbald. In the whole range of romance, I know not a more pathetic transition than from Miss Milner’s wedding-day to her death-bed—from her innocent youth to her guilty maturity, as hazarded in that interesting work.

But I perceive that my readers are at length becoming alarmed as well as impatient. They are apprehensive of some over-bold demand upon their forbearance;—they imagine that like the Duchess of Malfy, in Marlowe's tragedy, I shall favour them with the production of a fine family of sixteen children between the acts; or, in emulation of the admirable Potier, display the change between manhood and old age in the vicissitude of half a minute. But for my own part, I am more moderate. Five years is the utmost stretch of imagination I presume to exact from my gentle lectors; praying them to believe that my motive for this condensation of time, is to spare them the prolonged monotony of unsuccessful match-making, and *parti* hunting—of “dead sets” made at successive heirs, and eldest sons—followed by the endless disappointments and smiling vexation of defeated coquetry.

It was on the 25th of April, 1830, that Lady Maria Willingham and her three daughters

landed for the second time on the Dover Pier, exactly four years and nine months after the Ebury *fête champêtre*;—and a simple record of this solitary fact will, I trust, induce my readers to acknowledge that my prosy preamble was not without a sufficient motive. Lady Maria was grown old, and fretful, and selfishly careful of her health—but was utterly unsuspicious of any such alterations. Claudia and Eleanor had lost the buoyant spring of youth, and were becoming faded, and factitious in their appearance; yet they were blind to the changes of time, and only the more desperately bent upon a final matrimonial effort during the approaching London season.—Minnie—Minnie alone—had progressed into a fuller exuberance of beauty! The lovely girl had expanded into an enchanting woman; and what was far more to the purpose in the estimation of her family, and of many of her friends—*poor* little Minnie had become *a rich heiress*!

Now although the former facts are sufficiently

consequent and comprehensible, this latter statement is of so startling a character that I shall venture, in explanation, on a brief *r  sum  * of the events of the interval; looking back upon the past with the same bird's-eye glance of retrospection with which we are enabled to concentrate the last five years of our own individual reminiscences, into a mental half inch of a  rial perspective.

The projected excursion to Spa had not proved ineffective. Lady Robert Lorton had succeeded in dissipating her *ennuis*; and Claudia, in the sparkling springs of the Pouhon, had renovated the fountains of exhausted health, if not of faded self-content. The flush of youth which dawned anew upon her cheek, had at least incited her to dream of fresh conquests; and if she did not in secret cease to regret Calmersfield, and sigh after its Duke, it is certain that more than one heir-apparent became the object of her speculations in the course of the ensuing winter at Paris. Vexed and dis-

appointed beyond measure by the event of their unsuccessful London campaign, the Willinghams had succeeded in persuading Lord and Lady Robert Lorton—who had their own motives of distaste for a premature return to England—to remove from Spa to the Chaussée d'Antin, and for once attempt the varieties of a Parisian season. And when at the close of the Carnival Lord Robert began to talk of “a call of the House,” and Lady Robert to sigh for Arlington-street, it was discovered that hot rooms, and the *galopade* had renewed the symptoms of Claudia's indisposition; and Lady Maria judiciously contrived that Dr. Gall should instantly favour her own wishes and her own finances, by prescribing a summer in Switzerland, and a winter in Italy, for her daughter's final restoration.

Who does not know the fascinations of Florence—with its diplomatic hospitality—its private Theatricals—its unostentatious court—and literary resources?—Who that has dreamed

away six happy months beside the Arno, does not feel inclined, like the Willinghams, to refresh themselves during the summer season at Pisa, or Lucca, or Leghorn ; and return for a second winter to the society of the Burghershes, and Normanbys, and the happy circles which they enliven ?—Lady⁵ Maria, having accurately discerned that every young nobleman on the grand tour betakes himself to a temporary residence at Schneider's Hotel—and that every English millionaire, on his road to St. Peter's or Vesuvius, unfailingly seeks an abiding place for a time in the *Lung' Arno*, was quite satisfied that she had posted herself on “a coigne of 'vantage,” for the pursuance of her matrimonial manœuvres ; and although Lord Basingstoke flirted to desperation with Claudia for a fortnight, and then went his way to the Vatican—and although Eleanor had all but netted Sir Timothy Omnium—who, on the expected eve of a declaration, had flown off on the rumour of a tempting subterraneous rumble audible at Ca-

serta—yet she had been slow to discover that of all birds, birds of passage are the most difficult to bring down.

In the mean time she was still better satisfied with the position occupied at Heddeston Court by her youngest daughter. Lady Willingham indeed had died during their Swiss autumn;—a victim, it was said, to the frigid virtue of not allowing her dressing-room fire to be lighted before Michaelmas day. But her maternal duties were replaced, and more than replaced by the gentle Mary; who now presided over Sir Joseph's establishment, and under whose tender fosterage the virtues and charms of her cousin Minnie had been cherished into the very perfection of female loveliness. Many persons asserted, and many travellers bearing letters of introduction to Italy attested to her cousins, that Mary herself had been equally benefited by the collision; and that through the exertions necessitated by her Mentorial responsibility, she had polished away the reserve of her

own demeanour, and acquired a degree of graceful self-possession—the only charm missing among the many which embellished her truly feminine character.

This however was a fact which Lady Maria could never suffer herself to believe or admit; and the satisfaction she derived from Minnie's domestication at Heddeston arose neither from Miss Willingham's acknowledged superiority of mind and manners, nor even from her brother's triumphant position in the world; although Charles had already distinguished himself by his maiden-speech, and attracted the favourable notice of all the leading politicians of the day. Notwithstanding the seeming eligibilities of such a match, Lady Maria had never included her nephew among her matrimonial projects for the daughter she had abandoned. She would have altogether despised poor Charles Willingham for a son-in-law; inasmuch as, from Minnie's earliest years, she had entertained well-grounded expectations of seeing her become the wife of the

idle, dissolute, selfish, unfeeling Lord Stapylford !

Unfortunately her daughter's predilections served to confirm the plan. Distinguished from her childhood by the preference of the volatile Montagu, Minnie had learned to love her "*petit mari*" long before she understood the meaning of the term. Mary's sage remonstrances, Aunt Willingham's rigid strictures, Sir Joseph's tedious reprobation, and even old Lady Monteagle's, and Lady Dynevour's, and Lady Stapylford's impertinent interference, had only tended to strengthen her original feelings in his favour. Secretly supported in her obstinacy by Lady Maria's epistolary encouragement, Minnie's attachment had gone through the usual process of clandestine correspondence, and clandestine engagement; and as her lover was restrained by the will of the late lord from the enjoyment of his property before attaining the age of twenty-three, and as the present Lord Stapylford maintained a stedfast intimacy with

Mr. Tichborne, and a close connection with Messrs. Presswell, Screw, and Company, there seemed every probability that the young nobleman's fortune, and his minority, would diminish in sympathetic unison.

Of this circumstance, however, Lady Maria Willingham, from her residence on the Continent, was only partially aware; while her daughter, living in rural seclusion at Hedges-ton, persuaded herself that every rumour to "dear Stapylford's" disadvantage, arose from the malice of their neighbour, his Monteagle grandmother; and from the prudish severity of Mary's principles.

While every tongue his follies nam'd
She fled the unwelcome story,
Or found in e'en the faults they blam'd
Some gleams of future glory !

His profusion she called generosity; his excesses, originality; his libertinism, the exaggerated invention of ill-nature. While Lord Stapylford

was driving his mistress in the park, Minnie was quietly and unsuspectingly occupied with her sketch-book among the beech-woods of Heddeston—satisfied that her affianced lover was a miracle of constancy ; and while he was losing thousands and tens of thousands by the “hazard of the die,” his confiding Minnie was assuring her absent mother and sisters, that “Montagu was every thing she could wish ; and that every affectionate letter marked more eagerly than the last, his impatience for the period of their final union.”—Poor little Minnie ! she was destined to be as easy a dupe, as all the most amiable portion of her confiding sex are, alas ! only too commonly rendered by the duplicity of mankind.

Meantime, Lady Monteagle grumbled and scolded ;—Charles, his former friend, was severely silent ;—and the gentle Mary disconsolately shook her head. They saw that—in spite of Minnie’s doating confidence, and in spite of Lord Stapylford’s obstinate adherence

to his courses of wild profusion—a fatal day of reckoning was approaching for both.

The twenty-third birth-day, so anxiously anticipated by all parties, at length arrived. Lord Stapylford was declared to be of age—and a ruined man!—Executions from a hundred different quarters besieged his town-house; while the mortgagees took possession of Stapylford Park. His Lordship entertained serious thoughts of shooting himself; but on being roused by the information that his principal Sultana had carried herself and her diamonds to Paris, under Mr. Tichborne's protection, he consoled himself by uttering a thousand imprecations against his own folly, and by going to bed in a state of brutal intoxication.

On Minnie these overwhelming discoveries produced a very different effect. The delicacy of her sex and age, had of course forbidden her participation in the knowledge of many of the most revolting features of the case; and as she had heard nothing of Mademoiselle Adolphine

and the drunkenness, and much concerning the executions and mortgagees—concerning Montague's abandonment by his friends, and Montague's crying necessities, she had not failed to exalt him into a hero of romance—to weep during a whole sleepless night in contemplation of his unmerited afflictions—and to devote herself to him and his cause more vehemently than ever. Vainly did her uncle recite from the *Morning Post*, the following day at breakfast, a statement as clear, and candid, and awful, and implicatory—as dashes, and asterisks, and italics could make it—of the crimes, and misdemeanors, and fooleries of the ruined spendthrift;—Minnie Willingham shed a silent tear or two over her dry toast, and remained fixed in her resolve to share the miserable destinies of her beloved Stapylford!—Vainly did Mary profit by her father's indignant exit from the breakfast-room, to point out as delicately as she could, the selfish egotism of Montague's conduct;—the vices he had contracted in the loathsome society

to which he had accustomed himself;—and his total disregard to the future interests and happiness of his affianced bride;—Minnie Willingham raised a reproachful glance towards her gentle cousin, implying an accusation similar to that uttered by the young Israëlite in Rossini's Italian opera, to the gaunt representative of *MOSE IN EGITTO*. “*Moses! you have never loved!*”—For Minnie knew nothing of a certain Frederick Lorimer; and like all the rest of the county of Kent, had attributed Mary's rejection of the proposals of some dozen of its landed proprietors, to constitutional indifference and coldness of heart.

All this time, however, poor Minnie had kept silence, even from good words. She entertained no intention of being convinced, and had no taste for hearing Lord Stapylford reviled; and she therefore wisely abstained from provoking further idle argument by verbal opposition. But when Mr. Willingham, who had hitherto contented himself with violently stirring his tea

under a sense of contemptuous irritation, derived from all that was passing around him—or with lifting his eyes from the newspaper he was perusing, to throw a glance of disgust upon the sullen object of Mary's persuasive eloquence—burst into an involuntary exclamation of “Minnie, I am astonished at your want of sense and want of feeling !” her indignation became seriously excited ; and at the last she spake with her tongue.

“ You are extremely impertinent, Charles ! as well as extremely unkind ; and I beg to assure you that if Mary's counsels do not succeed in convincing me of my error, I certainly shall not turn for enlightenment to your own.”

“ Heaven knows I am little in the habit of forcing them upon you, or upon any one. As long as I had any hope of Stapylford's reformation—as long as I saw any chance of concealing his excesses from your knowledge, I allowed you to nourish your delusions. That time is past ;—the whole world knows—as *I* have long known—

that he is a ruined man—ruined by vice, and intemperance, and the grossest folly;—ruined even while he knew that the innocent affections of a confiding girl were involved in the catastrophe. Had he really loved you, Minnie—loved you as a woman ought to be loved—and ought to *desire* to be loved—this could not have been. Had he really loved you, the sharper and the wanton could not have been made his chosen companions. Often when, had he so willed it, he might have been by your side, sharing your occupations—your walks, your smiles, your tenderness—he preferred the fœtid atmosphere of the midnight Hell—the orgies of Mr. Tichborne and his gang—the converse of the depraved and the depraving.”

Minnie, provoked by these unanswerable facts, now attempted to disguise her emotions under a redoubled tide of recrimination.

“Your good information on all these topics only serves to confirm your own treachery. Had you not inveigled yourself into Stapylford’s

confidence by making yourself the companion of his thoughtless follies, you would have been unable to furnish this list of his offences. Me-thinks, Charles, that you, who affect to be so saintly and so philosophic in your pursuits, might have been better employed than in prying into the indiscretions of others in order to screen the indulgence of your own."

" You are unjust to my brother, dear Minnie," interrupted Mary, astonished by her petulance. " You know that he tenders your interests with the same fervent regard he bestows upon my own, and that nothing but his eager interest in your welfare——"

" I reject it—I abjure it altogether!" exclaimed Minnie, still more vehemently moved by the imperturbable equanimity of Charles Willingham. " While my cousin Charles kept up the hypocritical pretension of being Stapylford's friend, I had no objection that he should also remain my counsellor. But the days of deception are over;—he has thrown off the

mask—and taken courage to avow himself the enemy of one who, if he disgraces himself by the indiscretions natural to his age, is at least free from the craftiness befitting maturer years ! Yes ! Charles—start and redden if you will !—but Montague Stapylford's enemies are mine also ;—you have thrown down the gauntlet to us both, and henceforth I shall studiously teach myself to regard you as a stranger to my heart.”

Mary literally gasped for breath ;—she was persuaded that her brother's feelings would be either deeply hurt or deeply irritated by his cousin's unjust accusations and ungentle warmth, and she was all amazement to see him rise calmly from his seat, and leave the room ; observing as he passed his cousin—but with a voice and demeanour equally undisturbed—“ I forgive you, Minnie ! for you are not yourself this morning, or you would shrink from the ingratitude of throwing off, on a moment's provocation, the affectionate—the forbearing friend

of the last sixteen years!—I forgive you, my dear cousin, and even without appealing against your injustice. But remember, that should you feel inclined to call me again into your confidence—should you, when you find yourself neglected, and perhaps even abandoned by this worthless object of your blind idolatry—should you at such a moment be disposed to call upon your cousin Charles for redress, or sympathy—you will never find him wanting in your cause. God bless you, Minnie!—I wish I could soften the blow which I see about to fall on your innocent head.”

Scarcely had he left the breakfast-room when Minnie, throwing herself into Miss Willingham’s arms, attempted to expiate her “ungrateful injury” by a flood of bitterly repentant tears. She accused herself of want of feeling, and (with some justice in the present instance) of want of temper; but she would on no account suffer her cousin Charles to be recalled in order to receive his share of her self-criminating

apologies. "He was gone to the library," she said;—"was already busy with his books, and pamphlets, and tiresome politics; and had probably forgotten both herself and her offences in the interest of some odd volume of parliamentary annals."

It was not, however, his forgetfulness, but his kindness that Minnie feared to encounter. She knew that the merest expression of contrition on her part, would be met on his with an effusion of brotherly tenderness such as she little merited—such as would only serve to soften her heart anew, and to re-open those sluices of tearful emotion for which she began to foresee full many a legitimate source. She was satisfied therefore to leave herself in the wrong, and obstinate, and ungrateful, in the opinion of her philosophical cousin.

CHAPTER X.

Now pray you seek no colour for your going,
But bid farewell, and go ! When you sued staying
Then was the time for words. No going then—
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows bent.

Antony and Cleopatra.

MR. WILLINGHAM, meanwhile, neither represented the evil-speaking and evil-thinking of his cousin, nor would allow Mary to utter one syllable in reprehension of her pettish wilfulness. He was well aware that a world of undiscovered and unsuspected troubles remained in store for her ;—he had a far deeper insight than herself or her family into the real character of Lord Stapylford.

In fact it is only among men—and more especially among men of his own age and calling—that the secret disposition and innate tendency of a man's feelings can be justly appreciated;—to the other sex he manifests himself only in his holiday suit of smiles and sunshine. In the temporary excitement of female society, the most ill-tempered man can smooth his brow into moderation; the coarsest can attune his speech into an assumption of delicacy; the unprincipled can shroud his designs under a mask of specious reserve; and the unfeeling assume the soft semblance of repressed emotions.

But among their brothers of the broad-cloth, this hypocrisy can neither endure nor be endured. There is an electric chain revealing the invisible shock—there is a tacit freemasonry betraying the initiated—which admit of no disguise. In spite of well-mouthing principles of honour and moral rectitude, there circulates a sort of mysterious “hue and cry,” revealing the names of defaulters, and the misdemeanors

of unconvicted criminals—a species of club-warning betraying the real character of every man of fashion and family about town; and a woman who is seriously bent upon ascertaining and appreciating the merits of her lover, may enlighten herself at once upon the subject, by noting the estimation in which he is held by those of his own sex and his own degree. A single *inquiry* will defeat her purpose; for few men, and no women, are to be regarded as unprejudiced witnesses; but a few instances of tranquil observation on her own part, will supply her with particulars of evidence as ample as could be furnished by the most active Parisian Commissary of Police.

Charles Willingham, in his unrestrained intercourse with Lord Stapylford, had found a thousand motives for the relaxation of their boyish friendship. It was not his extravagance, his sensuality, or his devotion to libertine associates, by which he had thus disgusted the familiar companion of his early years;—for

Charles had many a friend, equally dissipated in his habits, for whom he contrived to cherish an unfailing regard. But in Montague Stapylford he detected the traces of a cold and callous selfishness. Provided his own horse, his own dinner, his own wine, were assorted to his fancy, Lord Stapylford cared for the wants, the distresses, or the perplexities of no single person in the world ! By a perpetual collision with such companions as Tichborne and Wolyryche, he had acquired this species of moral self-defence against their innovations ; the sole object of his existence was to escape the languid pause consequent upon over-excitement ; and to secure himself a new diversion—a new toy—he would have sacrificed the interests and feelings of his friends, family, and associates, as well as his own reputation for honourable dealing and a gentlemanly demeanour. The best feeling he had ever allowed himself to cherish, had been his early and disinterested attachment for Minnie Willingham ; but even this, her cou-

sin Charles was persuaded he would sacrifice without remorse, at the very first instigation of his own caprices or of his own personal interests.

Nor was the trial of his Lordship's stability long delayed. His utter ruin had formed a whole day's topic of conversation at all the clubs; where the items of Mivart's, and Milton's, and Adams's, and Ebers's accounts, were very elaborately discussed. His more intimate friends were enabled to talk for full two days on the matter; for to *them* the expenses of Mademoiselle Adolphine's establishment, of his house at Melton, his shooting-box on the Moors, and his villa at Ebury, were accurately known. Others again—a chosen few—the *élite* of the *roués*—could garnish *their* edition of his predicament with a tariff of Presswell's rate of interest—with a private history of midnight transfers made at Crockford's after a third bottle of Château Margout;—and with insinuations touching certain bonds and acceptances, in which the names of Tichborne—and —, and * * * *, and ==, figured in a very mys-

terious manner. To all this gossipry, succeeded the investment of the Stapylford property by the myrmidons of Messrs. Screw, Gripe, and Co., Agents, of Great St. Helen's, London ; and the subsequent advertisement of Messrs. Flourish, House-agents and Auctioneers, "To Noblemen and Gentlemen," that they had been empowered by the assignees to let on lease for a term of years, "that capital mansion known by the name of Stapylford Park ; containing a suite of state chambers 434 feet in length ; thirty-five best bed-rooms, and suitable offices ;—together with a lake covering an extent of 1230 acres ; with five thousand acres of land, strictly preserved ; besides pineries, graperies, pheasantries, ice-houses, conservatories, observatories, menageries, aviaries, picture and sculpture galleries, &c. &c. &c. ;—&c. &c. &c.

Then came a three days' sale at Phillips's of the

"Private collection of
A NOBLEMAN going abroad ;
Comprising his unrivalled cabinet of 550 snuff-

boxes, besides cabinet pictures, *bijouterie*, and objects of *virtù*, collected at an incalculable expense, and to be disposed of without the least reserve.” Then a five days’ sale at Tattersall’s; the result of which offered enormous confirmation of the folly of the proprietor, and the chicanery of many a noble and honourable gentleman on whom he had bestowed his confidence. And finally there came a proposal from his Lady-dowager-grandame that he should accept a cornetcy in the —th Hussars (on the point of embarkation to India;) an appointment in the Household of her noble cousin the Governor-general (who generously offered him a passage out, in the frigate prepared for himself and family ;)—and an allowance of five hundred a-year from her noble self! On the contingency of his acceptance, hung the further reversion of her fortune and estates; which, as Lady Monteagle was seventy-three, and her daughters Stapylford and Dynevour had already fretted themselves into their graves, offered a

very immediate prospect of redemption from his disasters ; while on the event of his refusal, awaited a pittance of three hundred a-year, vouchsafed by his creditors—and an obscure and repining existence with his devoted Minnie !

Lord Stapylford did not hesitate !—He did not even refer himself to the opinion and counsel and choice of his affianced bride. Nay !—instead of attempting to move Lady Monteagle's feelings in favour of their immediate union and co-expatriation to India, he contented himself with inditing a letter to Heddeston, stating that he was “on the point of embarking for Calcutta with Lord Melrose and his Staff; that he cherished a very remote hope of improving his fortunes with a view to the future fulfilment of his engagement; that he would, if possible, pay a flying visit to his dear Minnie on his way to the Downs; that he begged her miniature might be completed previous to his departure; and that he remained her affectionate and devoted

“STAPYLFORD.”

Minnie, as it may be imagined, was touched to the very quick by this summary decision ! She was too proud, however, to remonstrate or repine ; and received Lord Stapylford's visit of adieu with affectionate cheerfulness. She listened with patience to his enumeration of the nautical accommodations he had secured for himself ; to his prospects of speedy military advancement ; and even to his encomiums of the merits of Lady Melrose and her daughters. But as she finally bestowed her own picture and a parting kiss upon the affianced lover of her early years, she could not but remember how gladly—how *very* gladly—she would have shared his poverty in some European retreat, however humble—however squalid ; or even braved the changes of climate and the terrors of the ocean for his sake. And it was many weeks after the “Owen Glendower, containing his Excellency the Marquis of Melrose and suite” had sailed from Deal, before Minnie Willingham was seen to hold up her head, or

heard to mingle in the conversation of the Heddeston fireside.

Minnie's friends—I use the word in its limited and veritable sense—however they might sympathize in her grief, and desire to spare her tears, were not the less resolute in their opinion that Lord Stapylford's heartless selfishness had been the means of redeeming her from a life of misery and dishonour; that not one spark of generosity—one trait of amiable feeling—served to brighten the mediocrity of her lover's character;—that he was a *roué* and a *polisson*—but not an “*aimable roué*”; and that Minnie with all her beaming ingenuousness of mind, and graceful delicacy of feeling, could not in the end but have learned to despise, and perhaps to abhor, a being so totally opposed to her own principles and sentiments. Under such circumstances, her escape was great indeed !

There were three personages meanwhile—her *friends* in the unlimited and social sense of the term—who entertained a very different, or rather

very various views of the subject. First there was the Lady Dowager Monteagle; who regarded herself as the true origin of Miss Maria's altered destinies. She had not sufficient discrimination to be aware that it was not *her* providential care of her grandson's fortunes—*her* proposals for disuniting him from his early love—but Lord Stapylford's own mode of acceptance, which had operated so painfully on the poor girl's feelings. Accordingly the crafty Dowager, although she ceased not to congratulate herself upon the success of her manœuvres, was not without some certain qualms of conscience respecting her own evil-dealing towards “a neighbour's child,” and a creature so fair—so sweet—and so unoffending as Minnie Willingham—a creature too, whom she had herself seen nestling in her cradle; and whom many predicted she would now live to see in her death-shroud;—and laid there too by the premature sufferings of a broken heart!

There often mingles a curious sort of mental

restlessness with the sins of threescore years and ten. Elderly people—particularly such as are in the habit of hebdomadally shedding their penitential tears at the Lock Chapel—are apt to wrestle with the long-indulged suggestions of their frailer nature with self-reproving feebleness. Clinging to the vanities of a world on which they feel their tenure to be slight indeed, and attempting to steer a middle course between mortal and immortal aspirations, they dare the destiny of all other trimmers—even that of being despised on one side, and rejected on the other!

Lady Monteagle was beginning to be really uneasy about the health of her supposed victim. She seldom visited Heddeston Court without a packet of “genuine extract of Quinine, prepared by the celebrated Majendie himself;” and even went the liberal length of enriching Sir Joseph’s cellar with some fine old Malaga—(of a date nearly as ancient as that of Sir William Wyndham’s Baronetcy)—for the benefit of the invalid. She would have done any thing, in short, for the

daughter of her old neighbour Lady Maria, and of her late esteemed friend Sir Charles, excepting bestow a nuptial benediction upon her union with Lord Stapylford. “ Montague was really such a *very* fine young man, and still so young, that he had every hope of retrieving his fortunes by a prudent marriage ; and to have him throw himself away on a pretty girl without a shilling, was a sacrifice she could not conscientiously bring herself to sanction !”

Although these prudential ancestro-maternal annotations were of course withheld from the ears of their object, yet Minnie failed not to retain an irrepressible prejudice against the too provident grandame of her dear Stapylford. Consigning the Quinine to the family medicine-chest, and the Malaga to the family butler, she contrived to linger in her own apartment whenever the Monteagle liveries were seen progressing along the avenue ;—yes ! even when the good ship the Owen Glendower had been announced, in the SHIP NEWS of the *Times*, as

having reached Madeira ; and when, by a descent into the drawing-room, she might possibly have been blest by extracts from her beloved Montague's despatches to his benefactress, in addition to the “ curtailed abbreviation ” of a letter wherein he had simultaneously announced his safety to her fair self.

Now this cursory epistle had materially aggravated the sentimental sorrows of the sufferer !—Lord Stapylford, in becoming sea-sick, had fancied himself heart-sick ; and like other voyagers, whose souls grow tenderly reminiscent under the pressing miseries of marine fare and cabin confinement, had put forth the usual fustian common-places of “ dragging at each remove a lengthening chain”—of “ Crotona’s sage—and the moon—and the unhappy exile longing to trace her image there.” And Minnie, who was extremely unpractised in novel-reading and sonnet-writing—who was in the first blush of an amatory correspondence, and who consequently regarded her Montague’s effusion as the

quintessential sublime and beautiful of erotic literature—had rendered justice to his eloquence by weeping the sheet of Bath hot-pressed into a condition worthy the drying lines of her uncle's laundry-ground !

Next among the dissentients, that uncle himself, perhaps, ought to claim precedence. But while Lady Monteagle founded *her* feelings of compassion towards Minnie's loss, on the perfections and personal importance of her grandson, Sir Joseph Willingham felt himself considerably aggrieved by Lord Stapylford's abrupt departure, under a profound sense of the “perfection and personal importance” of *his* own and only son. Minnie looked so lovely in her despondency, and was now so nearly (in *his* opinion) disfranchised from her former engagement, that he began to entertain considerable alarm lest his heir-apparent should fall in love with her ; and, according to the Dowager's especial phrase, “throw himself away on a pretty girl without a shilling.” It was this

very contingency which had induced him, ten years before, to overlook the growing partiality of his niece for Charles's **scapegrace** school-fellow, and four years before, to sanction their betrothment; without which amulet of defence against her charms, nothing would have persuaded him to submit to the perilous vicinity of so dangerous an inmate as his brother's lovely daughter. But now—all his precautions appeared to have been taken in vain—all his foresight wasted. *There* was Minnie—and *there* was Charles;—and left almost “to their own heart's most sweet society!”—Mary was so regardless of her own and her brother's interests, that she remained as much engrossed by her books, and her music, and her conservatory, as before the *tête-à-têtes* of her companions had acquired their recent peril. Yes! Sir Joseph clearly foresaw it all!—Lord Stapylford would be lost in doubling the Cape of Good Hope, or in the tail of a Typhoon, and Charles Willingham, the heir of Heddeston Court and all its

dependencies, would disgrace himself by marrying a beggar!

It would have been vain to suggest to so sordid a man, that those very dependencies might reasonably afford the freedom of matrimonial election to his son; but it might have been observed to him with equal truth, and far more effect, that the novel relative position of the parties, so far from increasing their mutual partiality, had confirmed their total alienation from each other. Minnie had never allowed herself to forgive her cousin's invectives against her ruined and absent lover; and Charles Willingham, who was becoming more studious than ever under the excitement of literary commendation and public notice, now devoted himself wholly to his political pursuits, and seemed expressly to avoid the puerile claims of his two fair companions; unless when his presence was actually needed as their protection through the dangers of solitude, or the decencies of society. All confidence between the cousins was at an

end; and Charles appeared to despise, and Minnie to defy, the enmity they had mutually provoked. Sir Joseph, with half a grain of understanding, might have perceived that there had been as little of smoothness in the course of his niece's friendship, as in that of her true love; and that the misunderstanding between her and his son, was becoming gradually confirmed into a settled dislike.

The third person—to proceed methodically—who shared not in the exultation of Minnie's friends on occasion of her lover's departure—was her uncle, General De Vesci. From first to last he had been destined to nothing but disappointments in his views and projects for the advancement of his niece's family. He really loved the Willinghams;—for, saving his narcotic wife, they were all he had to love!—He had intended Claudia to be a Duchess—he had expected Eleanor to become Lady Wyndham; and he had seriously purposed to grace the double hymeneals with a gift of Bank secu-

rities to a considerable amount; and—to use the phrase of the fairy-tale book—with “a bag of pearls as big as hazel nuts!”—Both had disappointed him!—and he had been so unpityingly twitted with this double disappointment by the multitudinous clan of Westland, and so unintentionally galled by the constant recurrence of poor Mrs. De Vesci to the subject, (who was apt to dream after dinner that the marriages had been really perpetrated, and that Claudia was to all intents and purposes her Grace of Lisborough) that his patience was altogether exhausted; and but for the departure of the Willinghams under the fashionable and redeeming convoy of Lady Robert Lorton, he would have run some risk of hating them for the remainder of their days.

As it was, he felt himself not a little indignant at being abandoned by Lady Maria to the society of his somniferous spouse; but, as he had too much pride to acknowledge his displeasure on that score, or his consciousness that

his own generosity had furnished them with the means of flight, he chose to make poor little Minnie's desertion the overt theme of his animadversions. “The girl was exceedingly ill-used!—Her education indeed!—why was *her* education to differ from that which had been bestowed on her sisters?—It was true that the foreign system had proved, in *their* case, but little to the purpose; but that was a fact of which Lady Maria, at least, appeared but slightly aware. And then to leave dear Minnie under the protection of those canting, humdrum, methodistical people at Heddeston Court! when Mrs. De Vesci and himself would have had so much gratification in receiving her!—It was really too unfeeling!”

On this hint he not only spake, but in the warmth of a yearning heart, indited an epistle to his niece; in reply to which, Lady Maria Willingham attempted to pacify her uncle by a confidential acknowledgment of Minnie's secret engagements with Lord Stapylford; and by

an appeal to his feelings in favour of the eligible proximities between Heddeston and Monteagle Park.

In a moment, the General's fury was propitiated!—"Half a loaf," quoth Sancho, "is better than no bread;"—a Lady Stapylford was better than no Duchess!—From that hour he waited patiently for the accomplishment of Minnie's seventeenth year, and of her young lord's majority, to bestow upon them the bag of pearls and the Bank Stock predestined to her elder sisters. But in the midst of his joyous anticipations, and his malicious hopes of punishing his nieces for the prolongation of their residence on the Continent, the intelligence of Lord Stapylford's ruin burst upon him like a thunder-cloud; and before he could look about him and form some suggestion for the renewal of his favourite scheme, he was destined to the aggravated insult of learning that Lord Stapylford had sailed as a Cornet and an Aid-de-Camp for India; and that his darling niece

was weeping out her blue eyes at Heddeston Court !

What he said in his wrath, is more than it would be decorous to repeat!—what he *did* was better to the purpose, and more to his credit. He addressed a most affectionate invitation to Minnie, imploring her to make his house her home; and accusing the mismanagement of the Willingham family, as the origin of the failure of her prospects. He even hinted that, had he been consulted, he might have superseded the necessity for Lord Stapylford's embracing a professional life; and acknowledged such kind intentions towards her, both for the present and the future, that Minnie, finding Sir Joseph growing crosser and crosser through the summer, and Charles still more and more morose, applied to Lady Maria for permission to pay a long visit to the De Vescis. Her mother, indeed, desired no better. The Stapylford connexion having evaporated—for she was indignant on discovering that her much injured

daughter continued to regard her engagement as binding, and determined to interpose her maternal authority against its continuance—she saw no further advantage to be derived from her residence at Heddeston ; and greatly preferred that Minnie should become a hostage for the interests of her family, in the General's household and heart.

And thus Minnie Willingham became domesticated with her uncle and aunt De Vesci, at Bensleigh Park ; and acquired, in a change of air and scene, some temporary accession of cheerfulness.—But it would not do !—she was an altered creature !—Her animated spirits had passed away ; her buoyant beauty had subsided into an air of meek and pensive loveliness ; and not even the spiteful Westlands, when they pointed out the change to her uncle, could permit themselves to exult in the result. The General was frantic with vexation and alarm ; and after venting his indignation by a profusion of ugly words applied to the modern youth of

the British Peerage, he resolved on consulting a synod of fashionable physicians concerning the efficacy of change of climate in the case of “Miss Maria Willingham.”

The “case” was *stated* to be one of galloping consumption ; and a winter at Naples was accordingly sanctioned as peculiarly desirable ; while being in truth one of mere sentimental despondency, the journey could do no harm ; and afforded the certainty of variety and mental excitement. Lady Maria and her daughters were already settled there for the season ; and within a few weeks, the De Vescis and Willinghams became co-residents in the Palazzo Manfredoni in the Strada di Toledo. It was many more, however, before poor slumberous Mrs. De Vesci could rouse herself to comprehend that she had really arrived in Italy, and was living within sight of a volcano. She was more than once heard to inquire “how long the Wrekin had taken to smoking ?”

CHAPTER XI.

Oh ! thoughtless mortals ! ever blind to fate,
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate ;
Sudden these honours shall be snatched away,
And cursed for ever this victorious day.

Rape of the Lock.

THREE years had passed since Minnie and her sisters had parted ; and now they met as *women*, sharing the same pleasures, the same views, and the same ambitions. “ Little Minnie” had become “ Miss Maria ;” and although her exquisite loveliness of feature, and surpassing grace of gesture were such as to throw their own pretensions into the shade, even in their brightest days—and more than sufficient to

eclipse them altogether, now that they were fading into the sere and yellow leaf of tarnished youth—yet Minnie's disposition was so gentle, her *naïveté* so captivating, and her present subdued state of mind so “soothing sweet,” that it would have been impossible to cherish one jealous or unkind feeling against her.

Claudia was more especially moved in her favour—for she, too, “had loved much;” and even Eleanor, who could fancy no deeper cause for sorrow than the blight of a matrimonial disappointment, and the wretched sense of having been defrauded of “a home of one’s own,” could warmly sympathize in her present feelings. When they saw, too, how patiently she disposed herself to endure Lady Maria’s caprices and flights of injustice; how honourably she exerted herself in their cause to procure indulgences, and fêtes, and generosities for *them*, similar to those lavished on herself by General De Vesci;—and, above all, when they found her guiltless of all intention to interfere with their

own flirtations, or molest their own speculations, they very cordially admitted her to a lawful share of their sisterly affection. They could not, indeed, persuade her to call Mamma "a bore" so often as they wished ; or succeed for a single moment in inducing her to speak or think unkindly of the inmates of Heddeston ; and they might possibly have ended by voting her character too tame, too enduring, too patient of evil, had they not incidentally chanced upon the name of old Lady Monteagle. At the bare mention of the Kentish Dowager, Minnie's indignation blazed forth !—But even on this subject the sisters were not destined to a cordial unison of feeling ; for Claudia and Eleanor remembered her only as a tiresome, parading, absurd old woman—as an object for mimicry, and subject for caricature ; while their sister, smarting under her persecutions, regarded Lady Monteagle's errors as any thing but a laughing matter !

Meanwhile, they readily welcomed her to

their confidence on all points, saving those little matrimonial projects on which they had been so long in the habit of restricting their plots to each other's bosoms. On these subjects, too, Minnie herself would have been found wanting both in intelligence and sympathy. She had not outlived the age of disinterested love; nor been nurtured in a land where its impulses are alternately reprobated as insane and indelicate. She regarded her sisters as too handsome, and too prosperous, and too agreeable to be in need of any superfluous manœuvring in order to secure themselves the certainty of a popular partner, and the prospect of an eligible connexion. That they were still unmarried she concluded to be, as in her cousin Mary's case, the mere consequence of their own fastidious indifference;—she knew nothing at present of the tempting influence of Mary's fifty thousand pounds—of their own oft-defeated schemes—or of the large majority of young ladies, both pretty, and witty, and fashionable, who are destined to wait in

vain for the “kindred soul” born to a participation of their matrimonial horoscope. Her sisters were occasionally betrayed into hazarding general principles of action in her presence, which were amazing and incomprehensible to her mind ; and into the utterance of certain odious expressions, such as “making a *set* at Lord ——”—“trying to *catch* Sir Thomas B.”—“setting your cap at a good match”—and “cutting a younger brother—a scorpion—or a detrimental”—which were at once as mysterious and as offensive in her ears, as an oration in “Thieves’ Latin” could possibly prove to the most sensitive and double-refined exclusive of the Travellers’ Club ! On such occasions, Minnie was apt to revert with tender regret to the modest elegance, the chaste purity of cousin Mary’s discourse ; to her feminine tranquillity of air, and patient kindness of audience. But then Mary had marred all her perfections by allowing herself to speak so unhandsomely, so disparagingly of her poor Stapylford !—and then

her sisters had such a consolatory torrent of angry vituperation to bestow upon that odious old Lady Monteagle !

In the mean time, the winter ebbed imperceptibly and not unpleasantly away. Minnie's impaired health and dispirited heart became gradually restored under the powerful renovation of youthful impulses. The land "where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit," was new to her enjoyment;—the "sweet south" poured its balmy influence upon her bosom, and the "deep blue seas" spread their tideless margin before her bluer eyes, unshorn of the mighty charm of novelty. While Claudia and Eleanor rushed to their balls and maskings, their operas and drives on the Chiaja, Minnie devoted her quiet evenings to the domestic dulness of the De Vescis; and her happy mornings to the exploratory drives and rides sanctioned, even in winter, by the genial mildness of the climate; and when, by some benign and especial interposition of Providence and the Foreign Office,

a new Neapolitan Secretary of Legation was appointed and gazetted, and—on arriving from Turin—proved to be the identical Mr. Lorimer, her demi-semi cousin, so warmly regarded by her friends the Willinghams of Heddeston Court—she had nothing left to desire !

With this same remote kinsman, and proximate friend, her sister Eleanor's name had never chanced to be connected in her ears. She had, in fact, been engrossed with her sampler and French grammar, at the period of his former intimacy with her family ; and vaguely remembering that Lord Stapylford had once alluded to an attachment, or a flirtation, between her second sister and “ his *poor* friend Lorimer,” she concluded that the hero thus tenderly designated, had been the eldest son of Lord Lorimer—a sucking politician of some eminence in his brief day—who had died three years before of a quinsey caught in the æolian lobby of the House of Commons, after a five hour's speech against an amendment on a road bill. She

therefore saw the gentle Frederick arrive, without the least suspicion of any embarrassment which his presence might occasion to the rest of the party; and knowing him to have been the schoolfellow and boyish companion of her dear Montague, she felt all that inexplicable gratification in his society which we are apt to experience on encountering the beloved of those we love. “I am not the rose!” says the perfumed earth of the Persian fable, “but cherish me!—for we have dwelt together.”

Minnie Willingham, by the delight she took in Mr. Lorimer’s company, certainly pursued the precept. She would detain him for hours, in General de Vesci’s vast and comfortless saloon; boasting to him of Mary Willingham’s perfections, and inquiring of him concerning Charles’s early acquirements. Her curiosity respecting Eton and Oxford really appeared insatiable. But while she talked of her cousin, she probably thought only of her lover; and in the course of her cross-examina-

tion respecting Mr. Willingham's dogs and horses, private tutors and mathematics, she was sure to elicit something *en passant* touching "Stapylford's pranks"—or "Stapylford's foolish extravagance."

Blest age!—when to hear "the one loved name" uttered even in a similar connexion with words of opprobrium and condemnation, we provoke a thousand tedious details, and brave whole volumes of commonplace;—blest age!—when our thrilling hearts and conscious ears shrink from the very sound we have thus laboriously sought;—why—why should thy poetical intensity ever become diffused into the absorbing prose of ordinary existence!

But while Lady Maria was intent upon her professional chaperonship of the two elder daughters whom she had now desperately determined to "get off her hands" to the highest and readiest bidder, General de Vesci considered it incumbent upon himself to bend his vigilant paternal, or grand-paternal, observation

upon the growing intimacy between his own fair charge and the young Secretary of Legation; but by no means with the design of prohibitory interference. He entertained indeed a very partial prejudice in favour of Frederick; who, from a generous, thoughtless, clever boy, had become polished, by a diplomatic course of half the courts in Europe, into an intelligent, highly-bred, and agreeable young man;—he had not only attained, by the decease of his elder brother, an honourable heirship to the aristocratic glories of the noble House of Lorimer; but those very glories had been recently enhanced by his father's admission to the Cabinet, and by all the consequent distinctions of ministerial patronage. Poor Lord Lorimer, after having occupied a corner of the state lumber-room for forty years, as an obsolete and unavailable piece of furniture, had been recently dragged forth to be garnished with crimson velvet, and furbished up with resplendent brass nails!—and he was now the President of a Board—was

talked of at all the Saturday dinner-tables as “a very able man;” and proved himself, in truth, as useful a log to stand up in the House as a butt for Mr. Hume’s random shots, as any other wooden President recorded in the Red Book.

Both as a Lord, and as a plausible log, General de Vesci had ever entertained a sincere respect for him; and as he now received at the hands of his son the Secretary, a far greater portion of deference and regard than the dandies and idlers—the *bon partis* and *mauvais sujets*—attached to Claudia and Eleanor’s train, found it worth their while to pay to an ex-governor, with a pig-tail, an indifferent coat, and a singular predilection in favour of his own prose—he soon began to concoct a secret scheme for Mr. Lorimer’s union with his favourite niece. A placeman—let his place be ever so insignificant—fails not to maintain a sort of official dignity in the eyes of a man who has himself eaten the bread of government;—

there exists a degree of animal magnetism in such words as “duties”—“services”—“despatches”—“pension”—irresistibly binding to their sympathies!—By a marriage with Lord Lorimer’s son, Minnie might perhaps live to be an Ambassadress!—and with that contingency, the certainty of her becoming a Viscountess appeared wholly unworthy of comparison, in General de Vesci’s estimation!

Having thus explained the motives which severally induced Miss Willingham and her uncle to extend their hands so much more cordially in favour of Mr. Lorimer’s reception, than in that of any other *attaché* to the British or any other mission; or of any Duca, Marchese, or Barone frequenting, or indigenous in the Court of the two Sicilies; it appears necessary to assign some reason for Frederick’s eager acceptance of their hospitality, and for the ceaseless assiduity which detained him day after day within auditory endurance of the General’s verbal, and Mrs. De Vesci’s nasal see-saw.

Lady Maria herself was far from cold in her hospitality towards her young cousin ; yet he entered the brilliant and intoxicating scene of her crowded apartments as reluctantly, and returned to them as sparingly as possible. Eleanor had made it her policy to greet him as if the events of the past had totally escaped her memory ; and Lorimer had become too much a man of the world to allow the slightest vestige of angry reminiscence to imbitter his demeanour towards her. He was ready to laugh, talk, dance, and even flirt, with either of his handsome and popular cousins ; and Lady Maria almost flattered herself that the “elegant and distinguished Mr. Lorimer” might in time be tempted to renew the overtures hazarded by “the forward and presuming Mr. Frederick ;” and as to the increasing frequency of his visits at the *casa De Vesci*—was he not by vocation a diplomat ?—and had he not a right to strengthen his interest in a quarter so influential, and so connected with the future pros-

perity of the Willinghams, as their opulent and heirless uncle ?

The Carnival was now at hand !—and “ varnished faces ” began to shed their mummery over the surface of the land. *Bals costumés* were projected by the various Embassies ; and the several representatives of European sovereignty appeared to acknowledge no prouder rivalship —no interests more powerfully conflicting—than the extent of their orchestras—the intensity of their festal illuminations—the varieties of their iced sherbet—and the exotic *récherche* of their buffet of wines.

Claudia and Eleanor, for the twentieth time in their lives, were frenzied with the excitements of the delicious passing hour. Every fête in succession was predicted to surpass its predecessor ; every new disguise was anticipated as offering the acmé of perfection, both in regard to elegance of costume and to the display of their own beauties. Claudia who, as the representative of Francesca di Rimini at the

ball of the Russian Ambassador, had expected the final subjugation of a noble young Finland bear—a Prince Astrapouschapouvitsh possessing three million wersts of territory somewhere between Astrachan and the North Pole, and a sufficient provision of Malachite in his copper-mines to encrust the stabling for his stud of 365 thoroughbred Arabians—was satisfied to transform herself into Anne Boleyn on the following evening, with the view of captivating a slender willow-slip of an English Marquis;—who looked as lank and inane as an ill-dressed *plat* of *Tendrons de veau!* While Eleanor alternately smiled as “Aline, Reine de Goleonde,” upon the French Ambassador—a widowed *roué* with gray hair, a fund of piquant anecdotes, *un nom historique*, and the worst reputation in Europe—and bestowed her endurance upon a lump of plebeian gold, as heavy as lead, in the person of a certain Sir Richard Westland—(Richard the son of Hew) who had been posted off to Italy by the united anxieties of that speculative dynasty, in

order to look after General De Vesci and his property; and who, in his own proper person, had encountered the emery and pumice-stone and varnish of Eton, Oxford, and a dragoon-regiment—without polishing down the air, idiom and parsimonious propensities he had originally acquired during his babyhood in the arithmetical purlieus of Finsbury-square.

The great trial, however—the mighty hour of projection—was reserved by the efforts of both sisters, for a certain Thursday, preceding the important “fat Tuesday,” which consecrates the temporary insanity of Papistical Europe; and secures the crispness of unnumbered fritters upon the identical embers destined to grace the penitence of the following day. The De Vescis had issued cards for a *bal masqué* on that evening. The Court and the city had engaged itself to grace the *fête*; and the Willinghams—ay! even the little Cenerentola herself—were vehement that it should prove the most effective entertainment of the Carnival. Indeed

there appeared every prospect of a triumph ; for what are the resources of Peer or Prince of Calabria or Romagna—what the revenues of Ambassador or Cardinal—compared with those of a ready-money nabob, with a Government pension and a substantial letter of credit upon his private banker ?—The suite of half-furnished apartments in their gigantesque Manfredoni palace, was accordingly prepared with the most lavish and sumptuous profusion ; General and Mrs. De Vesci vacated their own particular chambers, to make way for banquet and for ball ; and throughout their establishment a most complete disorganization in the animate and inanimate departments, put forth the anticipative shadow of a coming fête !—“ Never mind—never mind ! ” replied the good-natured General to every complaint of broken shins, and property mislaid, and draughts of air admitted, and draughts for cash disbursed. “ Never mind the temporary confusion ;—after Thursday, every thing will be straight again ! ”

Short-sighted mortals that we are!—that very Thursday sealed his earthly destiny!—The proverb says “*Vedi Napoli, e poi mori!*”—and General De Vesci fulfilled its injunction to the very letter. In the hurry and exposure consequent upon the dismemberment of his mansion, he caught a severe cold; and as the Physician to the Embassy, as well as the Physicians and Surgeons of His Majesty of the two Sicilies were far too much engrossed by the infatuations of the Carnival to perceive that the inflammation had fallen upon his windpipe, he was permitted to die as rapidly and with as little molestation as he pleased. Minnie alone, from the first moment of his attack, had become seriously alarmed for his safety; and although she could by no means persuade her sisters to refrain from the balls to which they had previously engaged themselves, she succeeded in prevailing upon Mr. Lorimer to share her vigils by the side of what she truly conjectured to be her kind old uncle’s bed of death! Before

daylight on the eventful Thursday which was to have filled his hotel with the idle tumults of music and festivity—with the importunate breath of the vanity of vanities—*he* too had become aware of his precarious condition; and immediately proceeded to prepare himself for the worst result, with the humility of a Christian, and the firmness of a man and a soldier. He desired to be left alone with his wife, Mr. Lorimer, and the Chaplain to the Embassy; and before the hour of their confidential interview had expired, Lady Maria and her daughters—returning in all their tissued trappings from the fête of the Sardinian Minister—were informed that General De Vesci, who had been moved to a suite of apartments adjoining their own, was already in the extremities of death.

In rushed Lady Maria!—enrobed in her gaudy apparel; concealing with an embroidered handkerchief two anxious eyes all-guiltless of a tear.—In rushed Claudia and Eleanor!—horror-struck and amazed—but in reality little touched

in the chord of true feminine mercy. A black valet-de-chambre, who had followed his master from the sunny regions of another hemisphere, stood sobbing beside the door of the anteroom ; and to *him* Lady Maria addressed her first explosion of tender agony.

“ Oh ! Sambree !—the poor dear General !—Who could have thought it would end thus ?—the very day of the ball—the day we have been all anticipating !—Sambree !—do you really think there is no hope ?—Where is poor Mrs. De Vesci ?—Has every thing been done ?—(then in a lower voice)—Has any body received the General’s last wishes, Sambree ?—Has any one inquired about THE WILL ?”

Poor Sambree with unintelligible incoherence asserted that “ his mistress had never left the General’s chamber, but that she appeared almost insensible to the scene passing before her eyes ; and that his poor dear Massa was praying for God Almighty’s mercy, with good Mr. Lorimer and good Parson Sheldon.”

Lady Maria regarded this latter piece of information as very little to the purpose. “ He is surrounded by such a set of sentimental inconsiderate people,” whispered she in French to her daughters, “ that I am persuaded they will let him slip out of the world without so much as inquiring into his testamentary dispositions ! Let us send for Sir Richard Westland.”

“ Madness—Mamma, madness !—that would destroy our last chance.”

“ It is dreadful to think of ten thousand a-year passing out of the family for want of a little presence of mind. What a terrible crisis !

“ Hush ! here is Mr. Lorimer !”

“ Oh ! my dear Mr. Lorimer ! what an afflicting event !—we are quite distracted !—is there no hope ?—has every thing been done ?”

“ Every thing—and alas ! in vain !—the physicians have just acknowledged that General De Vesci has not half an hour to live !”

“ What do I hear ?”

"He is still sensible;—perhaps you would wish to see him?"

"I shall make it my duty to overcome my feelings for the effort. There *are* duties, my dear Mr. Lorimer, which should not be overlooked—no! not even at the instigation of false delicacy;—may I therefore inquire whether any one has had the precaution to ascertain the poor dear General's last wishes?—I speak, of course, solely on my poor dear Aunt's account;—for Mrs. De Vesci is a helpless creature, and her interests should not be neglected!"

"Be satisfied, Madam; General De Vesci's will is already under the custody of the British Ambassador."

With this weight of apprehension removed from her mind, Lady Maria Willingham kindly permitted her uncle to die in peace! She reserved all her fussy and vociferous distress for the survivors; and felt herself called upon to bestow upon the ceremony of his interment, all the officious and pompous zeal she had reserved

for his *bal costumé*. It was wonderful how much she found to say, touching the dreadful shock which her feelings had received ; and how much to insinuate respecting the insensibility of the widow ; who, from the actual moment of the General's decease, had scarcely betrayed a token of life-like consciousness, saving by a vague and terrible smile whenever her health was inquired after, or her opinion referred to. Even her sapient nephew, Sir Richard Westland, acknowledged that it was extraordinary and disgusting to see a person thus stupidly callous at such a moment !

A still greater shock, however, awaited the feelings of Lady Maria than the General's death : and a still greater loss had already befallen Claudia and Eleanor than that of the *bal costumé*. The seals of the will having been officially opened, his property, real and personal (including Bensleigh Park—the mansion in Portman-square—the service of plate, and the bag of pearls) was found to be bequeathed—with a

reserved life-interest to his beloved wife—to “ Maria, youngest daughter of the late Sir Charles Willingham, Bart. !”—The Hon. Frederick Lorimer and Sir Richard Westland, of Lombard-street, being appointed executors thereof; and a provisional clause being inserted “that in case of the marriage of the said Maria Willingham with Montague Lord Stapylford, a forfeiture of eighty thousand pounds sterling should be deducted from the amount of the said personality, to be divided in equal shares between Sir Thomas Westland, Bart.;—Sir Richard, Sir John, and Sir Robert ! ”

It required all the restraining influence of the presence of his Excellency the Ambassador, and of the two executors, to repress poor Lady Maria’s indignation, on the official lecture of this extraordinary and abominable document ! Her very name omitted—her daughter rendered independent of her maternal authority—even the Westlands contingently preferred before herself ! She doubted not that it was all Mr.

Lorimer's doing!—all the result of a cabal between Minnie and himself!—they had doubtless beset the poor General's dying-bed, and softened his heart with their crocodile tears! And the worst of her grievances was the impossibility of venting her fury upon her daughter; for the will was undeniably valid—and the immediate heiress to a property of between ten and fifteen thousand a-year was no longer a person to be ill-used. Even his Excellency Lord * * * * had already begun to treat her with appropriate deference; and Lady Maria predicted that the next family event likely to require his official interference and announcement, would be the union of the fair lady of Bensleigh Park, with his crafty Secretary of Legation!

In this, however, her Ladyship was mistaken. Another family event was destined to intervene; and one of a nature equally unexpected with the last. Within three weeks after the General's melancholy end, Mrs. De Vesci was found dead

in her chair ;—the callous, insensible widow had perished in the silent agony of a broken heart ! From the moment of her husband's death she had expressed neither sorrow nor suffering—no ! not even to Minnie, whom she loved—and who had been unceasingly attentive in administering to her wants. She had not wept, or complained, or seemed to mourn ; but the one kind hand which for fifty years had sustained her monotonous existence had been torn away. She missed the accustomed tread—the familiar voice—the habitual inquiry—even the daily reproof bespeaking the intimacy of wedded love. She felt that the chain was broken—that her pilgrimage was ended—that it were a fruitless labour to bind herself to a newer and younger generation ; and the interposing mercy of a heavenly hand soon terminated the struggle of her lonely heart, by laying her at rest beside the partner of her long and uneventful life, in the cemetery of the Campo Santo.

Now had poor Mrs. De Vesci been thirty

years younger, her death would have been regarded as a very pathetic event, and a mighty triumph of conjugal attachment; but as she chanced to be fat, and fifty-five, and an object of interest to no mortal breathing, the English coteries of Naples prosaically decided that she died of a fit;—that it was a very fortunate release for herself, and an additional piece of good fortune for the lovely little heiress. Her nephew alone was of opinion that she might better have reconciled herself anew to life; for he had eagerly anticipated full ten years of Dowager-savings from the superfluities of the Bensleigh estate, to be divided among the Westland clan; whose sole prospects of advantage from the property were now derived from the probability of Minnie's future marriage with Lord Stapylford. Had it not been for his inferences to that effect, the thrifty Sir Richard would certainly have made an attempt in his own favour; as it was, he could find no better motive for consolation during the fruitless journey of his return to

England, than that the simultaneous deaths of his uncle and aunt had only necessitated the outlay for a single suit of mourning.

The feelings and projects entertained by Lady Maria and her three daughters during a similar progress between Naples and Calais, may be briefly gathered from the following letter; which was expedited by Frederick Lorimer to his friend, Charles Willingham, through the sacred medium of the Ambassador's bag.

“ *Napoli, Albergo del Sole, March 31, 1830.* ”

“ I have just parted with my ward, who leaves Naples at daybreak. Surely there never was any thing more singular than that I should find myself at twenty-five, guardian to a rich and lovely heiress!—that *I*, to whom the very name of Willingham was for so many years the rallying-point of every soft emotion, should become intrusted with the destinies of its loveliest representative! It was from your letters, my dear Charles, that I first learned to know Minnie;

that I first heard of her pure ingenuousness of mind, of her elegance of gesture, and still more refined elegance of character. While she was still an inmate in your father's house, how unceasingly were you pleased to recite to me the catalogue of her perfections; and to lament over the fatal perversity which appeared likely to consign them to the arms of a selfish libertine, such as Stapylford!—I then thought you infatuated; and that engrossed as you were by the interest of your public pursuits, you probably bowed your idolatry to the only female figure extant among your household divinities, for want of leisure and activity to extend your search among the scattered goddesses of the sex.

“ I am now enabled to beg Minnie’s pardon and yours for the sacrilege of such an opinion! So far from considering you prone to exaggerate the excellencies and fascinations of her character, I feel that you do not render them half the justice they deserve;—that you do not

estimate, within thousands of degrees, the delicacy of mind, the diffident sweetness, distinguishing her above all other women. I send her to you, embellished in person—strengthened in health;—and if not improved in mental or moral attributes, it is because amendment on those points was indeed difficult. So far from being elated by the greatness which has been unexpectedly thrust upon her, I find her dispirited and intimidated by the necessity for action which it involves. Her position is one of the most critical delicacy; yet I am persuaded she will extricate herself from its multi-form dilemma with all the dignity and amiable feeling characterizing her disposition. I shall anxiously maintain a confidential correspondence with my ward; and in the course of the autumn I trust my father's interest will procure me a remission of my official duties here, that I may run over to England, and take a more active part in the arrangement of her affairs. In the interim, I pray of you, my dear friend,

to watch diligently over her welfare and happiness. Do not satisfy yourself with the surface of things; or your reports will be far from satisfactory to myself. *You know* Lady Maria! Let me implore you not to suffer her to trifle with Minnie's destinies, as she has done with those of her elder daughters!

"In the hands of Sir Richard Westland and his family, the care of Miss Willingham's splendid fortune is perhaps more securely placed than in my own; and it was my representations to this effect which induced General de Vesci, on his deathbed, to appoint him my coadjutor in the trusteeship. But I feel that persons of the mercenary Westland stamp, are incapable of obtaining her confidence, or of protecting her better interests. Her personal happiness is a deposit which I consider to be my own peculiar charge;—and as her cousin—as the companion of her childhood—and *as my friend*—I call upon *you*, Charles, to assist me in the faithful discharge of so sacred a trust! If

Minnie's future existence should become im-bittered by any sorrow in my power to avert, I should feel myself cruelly responsible for——but *basta!* I am getting too solemn—too much of the guardian!—and you will probably scorn my premature assumption of office! *Changeons de ton!*

“I am persuaded it will divert you to observe with what subtle celerity Lady Maria has transferred her anxious affections to the youngling of her flock!—and how she is already beginning to reprobate the lovely Claudia as a fright, and the witty Eleanor as a dunce! Certes both the one and the other have grievously disappointed the matrimonial speculations which she amused herself with forming in their behalf on her first arrival at Naples.—Nay! she was even so obliging as to include my unworthy self among the objects of her efforts; and to imagine that my first boyish passion for her sprightly coquette, Nelly, was likely to be renewed after my experience among her Parisian

prototypes!—I am really sorry both for them and for her; and the more so that her indelicate attempts upon every *bon parti* falling in her way, tend at once to depreciate and dishonour, and grieve one member of the family, who is deserving of a far better parentage.

“ I have already written to my mother—the most deserving and admirable of women—to exert her best endeavours in favour of my gentle ward; and I beg you will intercede with your charming sister, if any intercession on my part be needful to that effect, to counteract the influence of Lady Maria, and to maintain our dear Minnie in her present views of disinterested rectitude, and steadfast purity of principle.—Farewell my dear Charles, until we meet again.

“ F. LORIMER.”

The opinion formed by Charles Willingham on the perusal of this fervent epistle, exactly coincided with that already devised by the crafty Lady Maria, and with that which we

preconjecture to have been formed by our readers in general:—namely, that the youthful guardian and his ward were already engaged by the sacred bonds of mutual affection; and that Sir Thomas, Sir Richard, Sir Robert, and Sir John, had already lost all chance of the eighty thousand pounds sterling, claimable upon the marriage of Miss Willingham with Lord Stapylford!

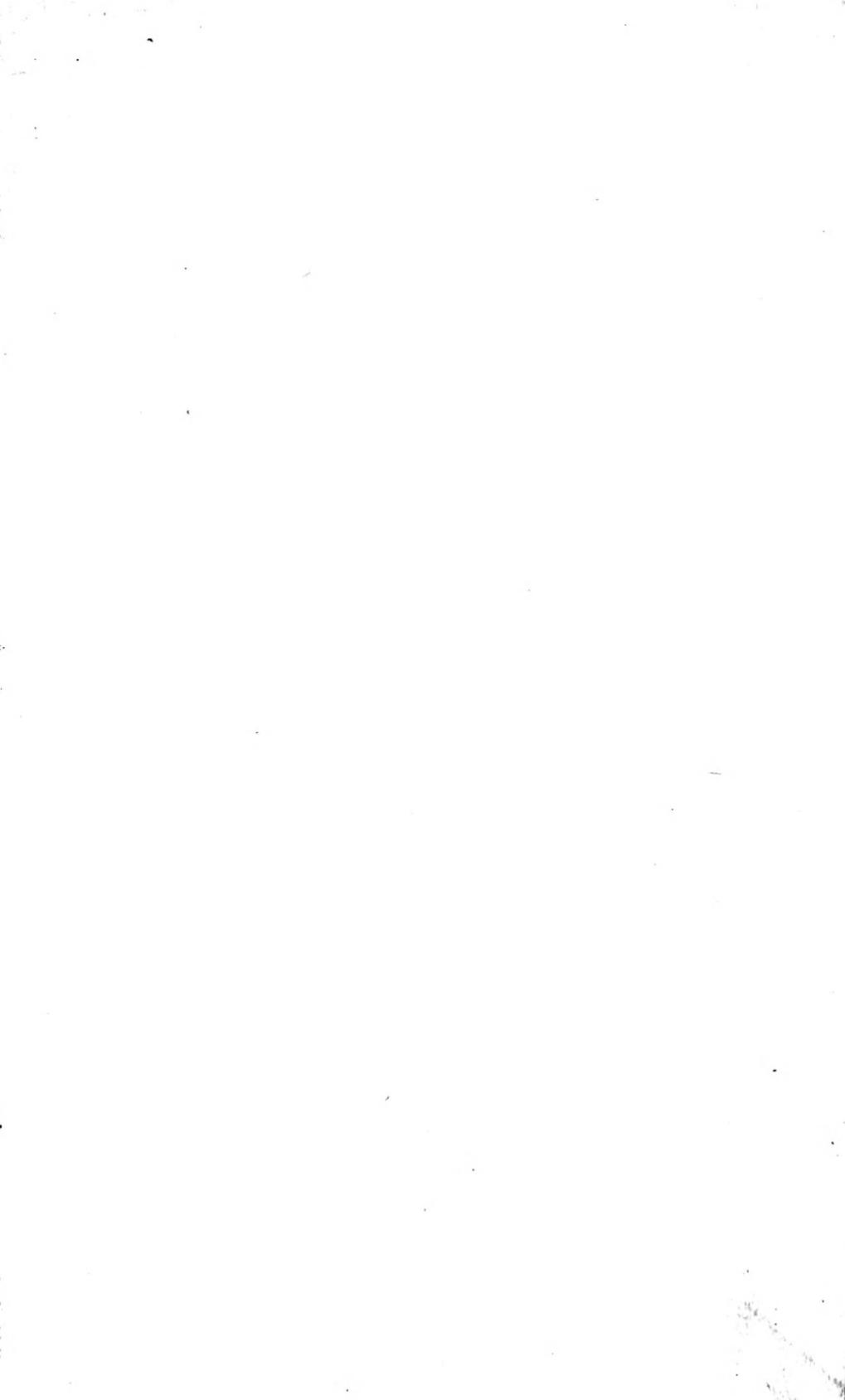
Nor did Mr. Willingham feel himself bound to maintain the scrupulous proprietorship of his opinion on this interesting topic. With skilful, but unwitting barbarity, he confided both the letter and his inferences to his sister;—thus destroying at once the visionary chimera of hope which patient years and untirable affection had nourished within her bosom. And both Charles and Mary, on paying their first visit of condolence and congratulation in Portman-square, and their tribute of unqualified admiration to the resplendent loveliness and refined elegance of their darling Minnie—were

persuaded that they were saluting, in the graceful heiress of Bensleigh, the future bride of the future Lord Lorimer! It may be imagined that both cousins were equally impatient to develop the mystery.

END OF VOL. II.







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